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The Hudson Review

A magazine of literature and the arts

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TO OUR READERS

We take particular pleasure in noting that this issue marks Marvin Mudrick's 100th appearance in THE HUDSON REVIEW. We look forward to the next hundred.

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THE HUDSON REVIEW is published quarterly by The Hudson Review, Inc., 684 Park Avenue, New York, N. Y. 10021. It is a member of The Council of Literary Magazines, and is indexed in the Social Sciences and Humanities Index. Book reviews are indexed in Book Review Index, and poems in Index of American Periodical Verse.

Subscription $18.00 per year in U. S.; foreign including Canada $21.00. Single copy $5.00. Special rate for bulk orders. U. S. A. Newsstand Distribution by Eastern News Distributors, Inc., 1130 Cleveland Road, Sandusky, Ohio 44870. Library subscriptions in England: Periodicals Division, B. H. Blackwell Ltd., P. O. Box 40, Hythe Bridge Street, Oxford. Back issues and reprints of Volumes I—XXXVI available from AMS Press, Inc., 56 East 13th Street, New York, N. Y. 10003. Microfilms of Volumes I—XXXVI available from University Microfilms, Inc., 300 N. Zeeb Road, Ann Arbor, Mich. 48106. We handle directly all requests for permission to photocopy.

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Printed in the United States of America. Second Class postage paid at New York, N. Y. and at additional mailing offices. Registered U. S. Patent Office.

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Reports:

Letter from Dresden

DEAR H,

Ordinarily I am far too great a snob to sign up for an organized tour to any part of the world. But I went to Dresden and Leipzig as part of one early in 1985 for three reasons. It is the three hundredth anniversary of the birth of Johann Sebastian Bach, and I felt an urgent need to touch the stones of the Thomaskirche in Leipzig, where he served as cantor for the most productive years of his life. Too, Dresden was holding a season-long celebration of the reopening of its gem of an opera house, designed in the early nineteenth century by Gottfried Semper, and destroyed on the evenings of February 13–14, 1945, as three waves of bombers, the first two British and the last American, annihilated Dresden's treasurable medieval core and killed 135,000 people. Finally, and perhaps most compelling, I wanted a quick and easy way to get another glance behind the Iron Curtain. A trip just a year before had yielded tantalizing glimpses of life in Bulgaria, Roumania and Hungary, and I found myself (and still do) in the grip of a slightly obsessive curiosity.

It goes back even further, really. Dresden had haunted me ever since I learned the story of the bombings. The triple blow, dropping about 3000 tons of bombs, including more than 650,000 incendiaries, on the city, kindled the most savage firestorm of the war, worse than similar conflagrations in Berlin, Tokyo, Hiroshima or Nagasaki. The pretense was that Dresden was an important Wehrmacht communications center and the fulcrum for troop movements to the besieged eastern front, where the Russians were advancing daily through Poland, East Prussia and Silesia. But the truth was that Dresden—like Nagasaki—was of slight military significance, and the Allies probably knew it.

As early as 1942, the British Air Ministry, prodded by Churchill, had made the bombing of German population centers a priority second only to the destruction of oil storage and synthetic fuel production facilities, with the aim of breaking the German will and hastening the war's end. Though American SHAEF officials tacitly agreed, the British feared the American government would never accept the change as official policy, and it was never proclaimed as such. But as the air war moved into its late stages in the opening months of 1945, the change was the foundation of a series of attacks on the German capital and other eastern cities such as Magdeburg, Halle, Chemnitz, Leipzig and finally Dresden.

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The Semper Opera House

Photograph courtesy of
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One story has it that the Russians, meeting with the Allies at Yalta, specifically requested that Dresden be added to the target list. Soviet officials have denied that since the war. It seems indisputable, however, that part of the rationale for the bombings was to impress the Soviet leaders with a show of Allied air strength. Relations between the Eastern and Western powers were strained or worse: British pilots involved in the raids were warned that if they strayed beyond the eastern front, which lay at that time along the Oder and Neisse rivers, and had to ditch, Russian soldiers might shoot them on sight. Some Westerners wondered whether the fierce Russian sweep would stop short of the Atlantic's waters. So British and American commanders wanted to demonstrate that the expense of blood and treasure on the western front had not sapped their ability to deliver devastating blows elsewhere.

Dresden was virtually undefended. Because it had so little importance to the war effort, the Nazi high command had not assigned it antiaircraft guns, and the few night fighters in the vicinity were immobilized during the raids by surprise and communications failures. But though the city had neither the concentration of German troops massed to move east, nor the Gestapo headquarters, nor the poison gas plant that the British bomber crews were told were their targets in their preparatory briefings, its population of 630,000 was swollen to something between 1,200,000 and 1,400,000 by refugees. They had come in farm carts and wagons and on foot from the Pomeranian and Silesian marches, fleeing the Red Army, which was visiting atrocities on the German-speaking population in retaliation for what the German army had meted out in its drive toward Stalingrad years earlier. On the first night of the raids, thousands of these refugees were huddled in Dresden's Central Railway Station and the surrounding squares, and perished there. The city, lulled into complacency by its apparent insignificance as a military target, had also neglected its civil defense readiness—though any degree of preparedness would have been of little avail against the magnitude of the firestorm that ensued.

Word of the horrors of the bombing and its aftermath spread quickly through both combatant and noncombatant countries. A firsthand account by a Swiss resident in Dresden during the attacks appeared in a Swiss newspaper in March, telling in graphic detail of the heaps of mutilated and charred corpses in the city's streets and parks, the mass burials, the devastation of the Old City's historic buildings and churches, and the stench of death and decay everywhere. But even before, both London and Washington were on the receiving end of shocked inquiries and demands for an explanation.

The propaganda potency of the incident quickly became apparent to all sides. The Goebbels office, hyperactive even with the Reich collapsing all around it, made use of Dresden in broadcasts and leaflets. Estimates of the dead making the rounds in Berlin, at first between 180,000 and 220,000, were soon revised downward to 120,000–150,000. The Soviets obliquely used the matter in a differ-

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ent way. Dresden was occupied by the Red Army on May 8, 1945, the day of the German surrender. Hanns Voigt, the director of the Missing Persons Bureau's Division of the Deceased, reported in writing to the Soviet commanders his own conservative estimate that the raids had killed 135,000. The Russians, apparently informed that belittling the Allies' might was the order of the day, "calmly struck off the first digit," in Voigt's words.

So, it appears, came about the "official" figure of Dresden's casualties. Thirty-five thousand was the count we saw in the abundance of references to "the barbaric destruction by Anglo-American bombers" on plaques, on signs, in guidebooks and in a variety of commemorative literature in this fortieth anniversary year. The catastrophe has obviously not outworn its propaganda value—not by a long shot. But there are signs of reconciliation. Our guide told us that a British bomber pilot who had participated had been on hand for the ceremonies in February on the anniversary of the raids, and—in a gesture she said elicited tears from almost everyone present—laid a wreath on the ruins of the city's most famous architectural landmark, the Frauenkirche, now a memorial to the war dead.

The British historian David Irving recounts the whole grim tale in his clumsily organized and erratic but still fascinating book *The Destruction of Dresden*.[1] And though his descriptions of suffocations and incinerations, of human beings reduced literally to pools of blood, flesh and bone, and of helpless refugees strafed by American Mustangs after the bombings' final wave inspire both terror and pity, the comprehensiveness of his account enables the reader to maintain a sense of historical balance. "Compassion for German civilians of February 1945," he declares, "may be coupled with the reflection that for the suffering of civilians of neutral and Allied countries in the Second World War the Germans showed scant sympathy."

The gruesome story had at least one happier sequel. The city's collections of fine, plastic and decorative arts have been legendary for at least a couple of centuries. The paintings, prints, drawings and sculpture housed in the Zwinger Museum, and the "Green Vault" treasures, works of porcelain, gold, silver, ivory, precious stones, marble, enamels, coral, ebony and the like housed in the Albertinum—together with the architectural splendor of the museums themselves—had earned Dresden the sobriquet "Elbflorenz," "Florence on the Elbe." When Allied bombardment of German cities first began, the art works and treasures were taken from the galleries and museums to nearby fortresses, chalk mines and sandstone mines for safekeeping. Miraculously, most survived, but the paintings in particular—works of Rubens, Titian, Rafael and Canaletto among them, along with German and French masters of the eight-

[1] Holt, Rinehart & Winston (New York, 1964); paperback, Ballantine Books (New York, 1965).

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eenth and nineteenth centuries—were damaged by cold and dampness.

One of the first acts of the Soviet occupying forces was to send in a trained team to oversee handling and transport of the art. The works were shipped to Moscow and Leningrad, where they were restored and sequestered, and in 1956 the Soviet government returned them all to Dresden. For once, his immersion in proletarian sloganeering notwithstanding, the Westerner had to concede the aptness of the rhetoric contained in a plaque on the Albertinum's wall: "The rescue of Dresden's art treasures by the Soviet army is an outstanding act of socialist humanism, an event of historical greatness. The people of the Soviet Union deserve our thanks for all time."

Now, Titian is Titian, but even granting that the painting galleries are first-class, no one would go to Dresden for them alone. The "Green Vault" collection, on the other hand, would warrant the journey: the goblets, vessels, cases, jewelry, weapons, basins, plates, decorative figures, sculptures, carvings and religious objects add up to an experience that cannot be approached anywhere else. Those who saw the selection sent to the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York (and to a few other American cities as well, I think) some years back will know what I mean. And what did not travel is more awe-inspiring than what did.

In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, mining in the Erzgebirge ("Ore-mountains") to Dresden's southwest made its rulers some of the wealthiest in Europe, and a series of sovereigns of the Wettin clan, Electors of Saxony and Kings of Poland, while neglecting none of the licentious and indulgent behavior of other minor European royalty, amassed art on a grand scale. Much of it came from craftsmen attached to the court, in particular from the patronage of Augustus the Second (1670–1733), called the Strong for his fabled stamina in a variety of exertions. (One of his numerous illegitimate children was Maurice de Saxe, marshal of France in Louis XV's reign.) The architect Pöppelmann, who created the Zwinger galleries, the sculptor Permoser, the porcelainist Kändler, and the goldsmith Dinglinger are hardly names to reckon with in standard art history texts. But what these artisans fashioned for the Wettin court illustrates the phenomenon of ostentation creating the conditions for expansiveness of artistic invention. The means, precious ores, stones and materials, seem inconsequential next to the grace, richness and imagination of the combinations and permutations.

Take just one example—for me the most extraordinary of the 1500 or so works, half of the "Green Vault" collection, on view while I was there. It is Dinglinger's masterpiece, a panoramic scene called "Grand Mogul Aurungzebe Holds Court in Great State at Delhi on His Birthday" (1701–08). On a field of partially gilded sil-

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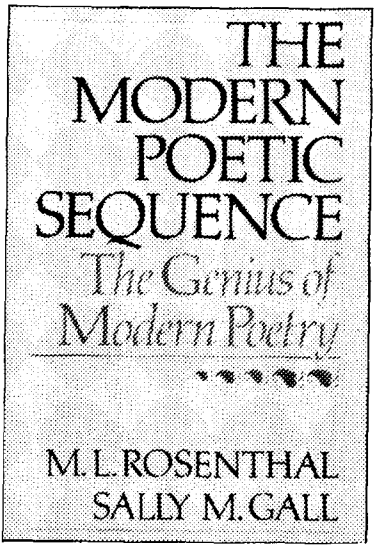

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ver measuring some four and a half feet across by four feet deep, numerous miniature figures, in gold decorated with multicolored enamels, are arrayed on several levels, ascending to the central figure of the lavishly robed emperor seated on a cushion on his royal dais, sheltered by an elaborate embossed gold and silver canopy decorated with enamels and precious stones. The lesser princes come with their households and their domestic animals—elephants, horses, dogs—to bring gifts, borne in ornamented trunks, and to pay homage. Caravans enter from each side to join others already spread before the mogul. The multiplicity of human and animal figures, in various attitudes of strain and repose, is staggering: some grovel before the mogul, some stand reverently or attentively by, some—further away—are lifting, carrying, holding parasols or banners, attending to the horses or elephants; some, well away from the center, link their arms behind them or lean indolently on a balustrade that defines the forward edge of the activity, staring into space and ignoring the hubbub. None is as big as your thumb, yet each is an exquisitely rendered depiction of a human action or mood. You could gaze at this scene day and night for a week and not exhaust the life it so vividly represents. The opportunity to stand mesmerized before it was alone worth the fare to Dresden.

Though the music, as it turned out, was not on that plane, Semper's extravagant neoclassical opera house approached it. Built in the early nineteenth century, it was destroyed by fire once before, in 1869, and subsequently reconstructed. But in 1945 only the outside walls were left standing. Dresden would not let them be pulled down, and seven years after the war's end studies began on restoration. Early on, the decision was made to rebuild and redecorate it to Semper's specifications, altering them only to accommodate side stages, modern stage machinery and so on. (An analogous decision guided restoration of the Zwinger.) So the auditorium's circular shape, the four balconies of the interior and its decoration, and the sumptuous marble columns and stucco walls, arches and ceilings of the vestibule, foyers and corridors, painted with mythological and pastoral scenes, rosettes and swags and *putti*, are now much as the house's first patrons saw them.

The programs celebrating the theater's reopening included Strauss's *Der Rosenkavalier* and Weber's *Der Freischütz*, both of which had their world premieres there. The fine Dresden Staatskapelle provided sturdy orchestral underpinning for both, supported by the clear and somewhat bright acoustics. Joachim Herz, stage director for both works as well, fashioned effective and idiomatic productions for the most part. Only in the Wolf's Glen scene of *Freischütz* did he succumb to the temptation to sermonize, with an effort to link the spirits Samiel summons up with the dead of February 1945. Among the singers, the veteran Theo Adam strolled through the role of Baron Ochs, which never seemed fully to engage him

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either vocally or dramatically (but Harold Rosenthal, reporting on the performance of opening week, heaped praise on him). Two others were outstanding: Reiner Goldberg sang *Freischütz*'s Max with strong, plangent tone and a sense of style that justified the enthusiastic word of mouth that has reached me, and a young mezzo-soprano named Ute Walther turned in a first-class Octavian in *Rosenkavalier*.

Of course, there was Bach: our party heard two performances. One, a chamber concert by the Staatskapelle led by Friedrich Goldmann, consisted of the Fourth Brandenburg Concerto and Fourth Suite, an arrangement for orchestra by Goldmann of fourteen canons on the first eight bass notes of the *Goldberg Variations* aria, and an original work by Goldmann, all splendidly played. The second, Bach's *St. John Passion*, performed in Leipzig's Nikolaikirche by the choir and orchestra of the Thomaskirche and their leader Herbert Pommer, was disappointing. The choir sang well, but the soloists—with the exception of the estimable Peter Schreier—and the conducting were undistinguished. Yet this was Bach at the source, and for austere music that will never be counted among "Bach's greatest hits," the Nikolaikirche was filled to capacity by an audience whose tongues included at least English, French and Spanish in addition to German.

I had come for the music only in the sense that I came to East Germany for the reassurance that these little stretches of ground reaching away from the Elbe's banks, where so much that has beguiled me—a citizen of a nation and a culture so remote—over a lifetime was first created, could still nourish those creations. Could ground so seared by battle, so stained by the blood of wars and revolutions and wanton killing for the pleasure of killing, where families slaughtered their own for carrying the wrong party card, and where a repressive foreign power now stations an army in part to guarantee that it will not happen again—could such ground still succour those few human products that at least partially redeem it? The answer is a tentative yes.

Of course there is tension between the East German state's orthodoxies of the moment and its role as custodian of artifacts that sprang from the alien roots of privilege and religious belief. I sampled one official guidebook of the early seventies, and found this treatment of the architectural monuments of Dresden: "For centuries the brilliant and ostentatious royal court of the Saxon sovereigns swallowed the vast fortunes earned by the people. Glory was gained by Pöppelmann, Permoser and Chiaveri, who were the creators of the world-renowned baroque buildings, yet the numerous builders whose craftsmanship contributed so much to Dresden's worldwide fame as the 'Florence on the Elbe' were nameless." The implicit quarrel is not over the monuments' value but only over who deserves credit for them.

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Today East Germany seems to be shaking off some of its postwar malaise and stagnation. Because of its unique political dualism, it had been ground hard under the Soviet boot. The road we travelled from Berlin to Dresden, the equivalent of a West German *Autobahn* but of an outmoded ridged kind of construction and in poor repair, passes through flat tableland with little visual interest, and nothing but road signs and an occasional distant smokestack spewing vapors to relieve the monotony. As the visitor's first view of the country, it was dismaying, and more so because every overpass on the way bore a proletarian slogan: "Bless and thank all diligence that strengthens our socialism." "Our indestructible brotherhood with the Soviet Union—the source of our strength." "Attentive, thoughtful, disciplined—I am with you." It was enough to make you long for billboards.

But eventually what I saw and heard dispelled these first impressions. A sign of the times is that, in Dresden, Leipzig, Halle and many other places, construction and reconstruction are abundantly evident: new factories, new apartment buildings, and restorations of, for example, Dresden's formerly scorned late-nineteenth-century bourgeois quarter on the riverbank to the city's southeast. Why now? Because, our Dresden guide told us in candor, "the Russians are only just letting us do it."

Our hotel in Dresden was a mark of the change: no Helmsley Palace (thank God), but comfortable, fresh and graced with a few amenities that new Western hotels seem to have forgotten—my windows, looking out on the Elbe, *opened*, and from either the side or the top depending on how much fresh air I wanted. The Hotel Bellevue, like Leipzig's Hotel Merkur, was built for the East Germans by Mitsubishi, another sign of the times: the minibar was by Sanyo and the TV set a Sharp. Since, like other spurs to tourism, the hotel's principal objective in the socialist scheme of things is to increase the take of Western hard currencies, its restaurants and shops are for hotel guests only and nominally closed to local people. But they come into the shops anyway, and purchase goods with smuggled West German marks.

On a Sunday, on the promenade of the handsome shop-lined Street of Liberation in Dresden Neustadt, fathers carried smiling young children on their shoulders, women pushed pristine baby carriages, and a few young people sported punk-rock clothes and haircuts. The shops had plenty of goods, from housewares and furniture to books, cosmetics and clothing of simple but good fabric and cut. In both Dresden and Leipzig I saw such capitalist extravagances as furs and jewelry on sale, but at very high prices. I saw only one line, and not outside a food market: people waited to get into the ice cream parlor at the corner of the square on the Street of Liberation. Everyone pulls for the Dresden Dynamos, the local soccer team, and on a warm day during our stay schoolboys gath-

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ered on the wide lawns fronting the banks of the Elbe to practice for the big time. I have heard of no riots among East German soccer fans.

A few days later I was in the Frankfurt airport, watching customers sheepishly enter and leave "Dr. Mullers Sex Shop," jostling and being jostled at a souvenir stand and the beer and wurst bar, waiting to board a jumbo jet with more than 500 other footloose Westerners. (Our guide had spoken wistfully of her hope that one day she could visit Paris.) And a few hours thereafter I was in New York, waiting for a train out of Grand Central, passing the time at the Trattoria bar and comparing New York's cacophony of enticements, its siren song in a hundred keys at once, with the subdued hum of the city on the Elbe. Whatever its hidden terrors and privations, East German life seemed free of the anxiety and narcissism that power the daily existence of so many Americans. Or was that only an illusion? After all, I got just a glimpse. But, once again, what a tantalizing glimpse.

Yours,
ROBERT S. CLARK

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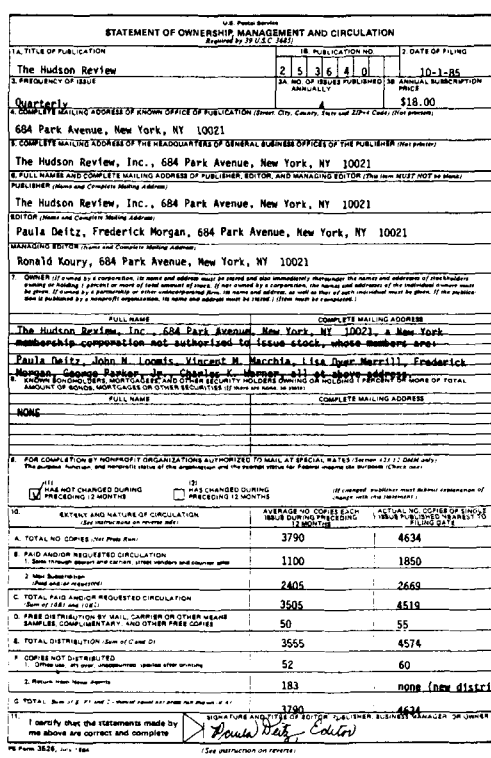

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3. FREQUENCY OF ISSUE	3A. NO. OF ISSUES PUBLISHED ANNUALLY	3B. ANNUAL SUBSCRIPTION PRICE
Quarterly	4	$18.00

4. COMPLETE MAILING ADDRESS OF KNOWN OFFICE OF PUBLICATION (Street, City, County, State and ZIP+4 Code) (Not printers)
684 Park Avenue, New York, NY 10021

5. COMPLETE MAILING ADDRESS OF THE HEADQUARTERS OR GENERAL BUSINESS OFFICES OF THE PUBLISHER (Not printer)
The Hudson Review, Inc., 684 Park Avenue, New York, NY 10021

6. FULL NAMES AND COMPLETE MAILING ADDRESS OF PUBLISHER, EDITOR, AND MANAGING EDITOR (This item MUST NOT be blank)
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The Hudson Review, Inc., 684 Park Avenue, New York, NY 10021
EDITOR (Name and Complete Mailing Address)
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Letter from Paris

DEAR H,

Americans know him well. In 1971, he set up a huge barrage of orange material in a Colorado valley; in 1980 he surrounded some green islands off Miami with a girdle of pink cloth. In all four corners of the world, he has endeavored to wrap statues and gardens, boulders and monuments. This fall, the pope of environmental art chose to operate right in the heart of Paris: as you read this, Christo will have wrapped up the Pont Neuf. During two weeks in September and October that venerable construction—which hardly deserves its name after four centuries of spanning the Seine—will have been wrapped in an artificial skin. This is *grand* art, "hénaurme"-ous even, as Flaubert would have put it: two million dollars, 40,000 square meters of synthetic cloth, 11,000 meters of rope, 65 mountain climbers in charge of scaling the arches and tying up the old stones.

The artist may be disappointed—it isn't certain that his megalomaniacal project will trigger any emotions in a blasé population, aside from some conservative grumbling. This population has had time to get used to what is colossal and costly, since the city has turned into a gigantic construction site. Bristling with cranes, gored by digging, crowned with countless scaffoldings, Paris today is at the mercy of—for better or worse (which is which? the favorite Parisian sport is answering this question)—an architectural frenzy, a bulimia of restoration. Behind its grey, sheet metal shells and brightly painted façades, the city is no doubt gearing up for some considerable changes, even though it is still a bit early to measure their impact. Of course the State, in keeping with a French tradition that always puzzles visitors from the other side of the Atlantic, is the main artisan of this urban upheaval: no president of the Republic would miss leaving his mark on the face of the capital.

A modernist in art at least, Pompidou had already endowed Parisians with that multicolored Center which officially carries his name—but which everyone calls Beaubourg. The wealthier Giscard d'Estaing's legacy is a nineteenth-century museum, whose costly fitting-out under the arches of the gare d'Orsay will continue for another year. The socialist Mitterand owed it to himself to do better, and in an entirely different style: for this guardian of the arts and letters, who appoints writers to ambassadorships and has his picture taken with a backdrop of books, the word culture is written with a very capital *c* (maybe even with a K, if more malicious observers are to be believed). Hence a policy of great works, preserved by the will of the prince of the economic crisis and of the climate of austerity—no unemployment on the "presidential construction site." Moreover,

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speed is imperative, since the coming elections will probably restore to power an opposing faction which is less convinced of the cultural role of the State, and meanly threatens to cancel the unfinished projects . . . Pardon this evocation of political vicissitudes but they have a considerable bearing on the cultural life of the moment.

While a hardworking population is crowding into the suburbs, Paris is cheerfully turning into a society of leisure. In the La Villette quarter, on ground formerly claimed by slaughterhouses, an unprecedented community is being formed, where arts and sciences will consort together. At the place de la Bastille, as symbolic as a location can be, architect Carlos Ott will soon be erecting a so-called popular Opera: the ambition of those responsible—Pierre Boulez, among others—being to open lyrical art to a diversified audience, without making demagogic concessions. It's a promise: no gigantic auditorium, no music-hall adaptations; they won't have *Aïda* sung, as in Bercy last year, on top of a pyramid . . . Egyptophiles take solace: in the Louvre's largest court, the third and principal presidential construction site, a transparent pyramid surrounded by three satellites will soon be erected. Thirty meters wide, twenty meters high, it is an arachnoid structure. If you pass through Paris and converse with the natives, taxi drivers and art critics alike will speak of nothing else: the daring polyhedron designed by I. M. Pei has touched off a civil war. In Paris you are either fanatically anti- or fiercely pro-pyramid. To join the first camp, denounce the project as costly and incongruous, claim that the pharaohs have no business in a former palace of the kings of France, and that no good can come of the unnatural alliance between a socialist president and an American architect. On the other hand, if you are militant for the opposite side, emphasize the reserved elegance of a restrained solution: explain that a glass structure, light and almost immaterial, is far preferable to another pile-up of stones in an already overloaded ensemble; point out that its archetypal form, inherited from antiquity and re-adapted by high tech, will create with its surroundings a seductive contrast rather than an unharmonious conflict; from a more functional point of view, boast that the polyhedron will allow light to penetrate into the 20,000 square meters of the basement, where infrastructures and reception rooms, which the Louvre so cruelly lacks, will be laid out (with minimal congestion). Lastly, recall the fact that the pyramid, which triggers so much passion, is but one element among others in a very vast urban project: *only* fifty million francs, in a global budget of two billion. For the world's greatest museum, which twenty years ago now André Malraux was content to clean up—a pathetic, losing battle against pollution and pigeons—is being remodeled from top to bottom for the first time this century; surgery which, one hopes, will be very cosmetic, is also a shock treatment.

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First of all, the museum will expand: the evacuation of the Ministry of Economics (another symbolic step) will restore to culture and to the Louvre the wing which stretches along the rue de Rivoli; where civil servants used to dwell, statues will stand; and the three interior courtyards, to be transformed into covered patios, will shelter masterpieces instead of official cars. Furthermore, this rather muddled ensemble will be simplified and refined: between the Palais-Royal and the Institute, the renovated Grand Louvre will form a symmetrical ensemble, the center and entrance of which will be precisely marked by the pyramid. And of course, the monument will get a facelift: the black forest of sculptures which, since the Renaissance, has covered its roofs and façades, is in the hands of the restorers; on scaffoldings wide enough for a car to pass on an army of stonecutters is re-shaping the noses of the statues and re-sculpting the capitals.

No question about it, Paris is going to be hell for people who don't like museums. They will also have to avoid the Hôtel Salé, where a large Picasso museum opened at the end of September. And the Grand Palais, now showing an homage to Victor Hugo. And the Musée des Arts Décoratifs, recently reorganized, and now aglitter with a spectacular success: the faithfully reconstructed apartment of the famous Jeanne Lanvin, who was a collector and patron of the arts as well as a priestess of elegance. (Her pearl-embroidered dresses, characteristic of the twenties, are well-known; but until now her collection of Impressionist paintings, centered on the one theme of women, and her curious decorative style, in which the influence of Pompeii works with Egyptian reminiscences towards a modernist goal, were underestimated.)

A favorable period, as my be seen, for cultural promoters—if not for culture itself. They demanded money: as of 1982, spending at the Ministry of Culture had doubled, and it presently approaches 1% of the State budget. They felt the need for a rationale: the planners have developed one, in a spirit of intervention and ambition, based on a few simple ideas. 1. The government shall not only encourage fine arts, but shall acknowledge that cultural development is one of its policy priorities. 2. Shunning both mercantilism and elitism, its aims are to subordinate economic progress to cultural ends, and to consider culture a source of development. 3. Open to all forms of expression, cultural policy must remain at the service of decentralized initiatives, and guarantee the expansion of pluralism at all levels. (I hope you will appreciate my summarizing in a few lines the official logorrhea with which the French are inundated.) Last but not least, a Great Promoter was needed to channel this energy: the Minister of Culture has cast himself *prestissimo* in this role, and made himself heard *fortissimo*. If surveys are to be believed, Jack Lang, through his exceptional dynamism, is viewed more with respect than with sarcasm; by parading his tie-less casualness from

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exhibition to festival, by subsidizing the comic strip as well as avant-garde theatre, and by showing as much interest in gastronomy as in opera (for television alone escapes the vast empire he has carved out for himself—he considers it mediocre), André Malraux's successor has managed to conquer the various media and a large portion of the public.

In the eyes of intellectuals, however, reality doesn't look as rosy as Jack Lang's vest. According to these eternal malcontents, promotion and agitation strangle a culture's creativity. Doesn't the enhancement of the heritage, justifiable though it may seem, conceal secret deficiencies in contemporary production? Can't "cultural development" be interpreted as technocratic compensation for a qualitative impoverishment? Might not the opening up to other countries—quite a rare phenomenon in France—be symptomatic of a private failure? Journalists aren't the only ones to ask such basic questions, in a country stalked by doubts and the orphan's complex (from Jean-Paul Sartre to Michel Foucault, from Roland Barthes to Raymond Aron, from Jacques Lacan to François Truffaut, France mourns the loss of her great men). There is no lack of grieving souls concerned about the disappearance of master thinkers, the reversal of trends, the obsolescence of the elders of the "structuralist generation" (with the notable exceptions of Lévi-Strauss and Dumézil), or the cosmopolitanism of the juniors.

The time has come now to conclude, but not without a confession. I admit that I am not sorry that Panofsky and Benjamin, Leo Strauss or Charles Peirce have been translated into French at last; nor that Central European culture, the Viennese in particular, is arousing, on the banks of the Seine, an interest as tardy as it is passionate; nor that Jack Lang subsidizes the *in extenso* publication—under the direction of Michel Serres—of the body of works of French philosophers (since the seventeenth century). Nor do I mind the publication of too many novels here (180 last September), when I discover among them Robbe-Grillet's autobiographical fiction, or Marguerite Duras' *L'Amant* (*The Lover*). And just to allow you to accuse me of intolerable eclecticism, I'll even admit my impatience to behold, rising in the heart of the Louvre, a crystal pyramid.

YVES HERSANT

[*Translated from the French by Denis Bellocq*]

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HAROLD FROMM

Leonard Woolf and His Virgins

I

If Leonard Woolf could be said to have a motto, it was not the "Thoroughly" imprinted under his father's emblem of a wolf's head; rather more appropriately it would be the reiterated theme of his autobiography: Nothing Matters. "In the end," he would say again and again, "nothing matters." This apparent insouciance, however, was the mask of a pessimism and fatalism that permeated not only his life but his writings as well. Of the Sinhalese natives among whom he lived during most of his seven years in Ceylon, he wrote, "When you get to know them, you find beneath the surface in almost everyone a profound melancholy and fatalism which I find beautiful and sympathetic—just as something like it permeates the scenery and characters of a Hardy novel." Both of his own novels, *The Village in the Jungle* and *The Wise Virgins*, are amplifications of this bleak purview: they show helpless but gifted protagonists self-deluded by an appearance of free will and control which, in fact, leads to disaster.

Woolf's apparent stoicism, as reflected by the refrain that nothing matters, was the product of a sensibility that cared too much, not too little. Early in his autobiography, he writes: "When I look into the depths of my own mind (or should one say soul?) one of the characteristics which seems to me deepest and most persistent is a kind of fatalistic and half-amused resignation. I never worry, because I am saved by the feeling that in the end nothing matters, and I can watch with amusement and detachment the cruel, often undeserved but expected, blows which fate rains upon me." But he also observes: "The moment at which officially I emerged from non-existence was the early morning of November 25th, 1880. . . . In the interval between 1880 and today I have lived my life on the assumption that sooner or later I shall pass by annihila-

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tion into the same state of non-existence from which I suddenly emerged that winter morning in West Cromwell Road, Kensington, so many years ago. This passage from non-existence to non-existence seems to me a strange and, on the whole, an enjoyable experience." To a man who was capable of enjoying life amidst a universe honed for annihilation, the claim that nothing mattered was a form of whistling in the dark, an anodyne in the face of man's uncontrollable destiny. This psychological condition is adroitly characterized by Leon Edel in his *Bloomsbury: A House of Lions*: "Behind Leonard's will to live lay a love not only of life, but of the despair of life: an eternal melancholy—as of the wailing at the sacred wall in Jerusalem for the perishable things of this earth." And yet, Woolf's life, as opposed to his umbrageous philosophy, seems to have provided very little ground for such premonition of disaster. Like Milton's, every stage of it was good, its beginning, its middle, and its end. To measure a life against a purely putative yardstick of perfection is common but senseless, for a life can usefully be measured only against other actual lives, against human possibility, not against the fantasies of heart's desire. And when a realistic measure is used to gauge Woolf's life, every part of it can be seen to have been superior.

Born into a well-off middle class family with high standards and values; inheriting splendid genes; winning scholarships to England's best schools; obsessed by the handicaps of Jewishness while enjoying only the advantages; experiencing a remarkably successful career as a young civil servant in Ceylon; returning to England to marry Virginia Stephen and to have as his friends some of the most distinguished of British intelligentsia; having a marriage that was far happier than most people can reasonably expect in a post–religious age when, cosmically speaking, nothing really does matter; enjoying a productive life through both his wife's and his own substantial accomplishments; and living to an old age filled with the gratifications that come from retaining one's powers to the very end and making the most of them (his autobiography, written in his eighties, is already regarded as one of the masterpieces of British lifewriting)—having, doing and enjoying these things, he was sorely misled by a fatalism that may have

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applied to the rest of the world but that certainly didn't apply to him. Everything finally mattered and everything was good.

That his wife had bouts of madness, that he was afflicted with a tremens, that he endured two great wars, that his wife ended her own life—in the context of human actuality these represented no unprecedented bad luck. All these things were the inscription of mortality, and most of mankind has seen much worse. Against the dark possibilities of ordinary human existence, Woolf's life shows up as an extraordinary success, an esthetic and moral triumph over the gods who may be dead but whose capacity for unleashing horror continues unabated.

Indeed, if there are any problems with Woolf's life, they would appear to be merely posthumous. Cynthia Ozick complains that he was insufficiently Jewish and that he dominated his wife; Elaine Showalter finds that Virginia was not womanly enough to suit her program and that Leonard has to share some of the blame; Roger Poole and Stephen Trombley believe that Virginia wasn't even mad and that Leonard's patriarchal Victorianism was reponsible for his shipping her off to brutal doctors who were invested in the madness business; Phyllis Grosskurth darkly hints that Leonard had a hand in Virginia's death by drowning. Leonard, it seems, has become archvillain in a Foucaultian Power/Knowledge operetta. But his life was even better than he could have known, since he didn't live to see it taken apart and put back together again by people claiming to know how to live it better than he did.*

Woolf's fatalism and its by-product, the protestation that nothing matters, are demonstrated with relentless and depressing intensity in his novels. Biographically speaking, this poses no problems with regard to *The Village in the Jungle.* The contrast, however, between the despairing conclusion of *The Wise Virgins* and his own life, upon which the novel draws to a considerable extent, has been a puzzle for many readers. Why, they would like to know, does the protagonist Harry Davis (the Leonard character) fail so dismally in his attempt to marry Camilla (the Virginia Stephen character) when

* I discuss these uses and abuses of the Woolfs at length in "Recycled Lives: Portraits of the Woolfs as Sitting Ducks," in the summer 1985 *Virginia Quarterly Review.*

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Leonard was so brilliantly successful in achieving this coup in real life? It is a question, one must add, whose answer is central to the impact that can be produced by the sort of reading of *The Wise Virgins* that is willing to range beyond biography into literary terrain.

Woolf began to write *The Village in the Jungle* late in 1911, shortly after returning to London from several years in Ceylon as a major administrator for British colonialism, and the novel made its appearance in 1913. Although it is regarded as a classic in a number of specialized literary circles, it is hard to understand why such a compact masterpiece has not attained wider currency. The tale is extremely well drawn, the narrative voice masterfully controlled, the philosophical point of view provides a focus without authorial interference in the narration, and the drama is magnetically conducted to its fated catastrophe, which is really the fate of human life itself. Although the early pages insist on the cruelty and evil of the jungle, to an extent this characterization is belied by the narrative that ensues. The jungle and its creatures are presented both with sympathy and with a perception of their ecological beauty, while the human actors and the rigid, blind conventions that direct them are, in the final accounting, the real sources of evil and horror. For though the animals necessarily live in accord with their full capacities, man in society is a creature always capable, in potential if not in fact, of being other and better than he is. And so we feel less disgust at animals that kill for food than we feel at men who kill for money, sex, or power.

The village of the tale consists of only ten houses set off in a jungle clearing, with a small population of whom the principal are the hunter-farmer Silindu and his wife, their two daughters, and a recently acquired son-in-law (in role if not strictly in law). Their individualist behavior sets them apart from a collection of villagers who regard their eccentricities as the cause of miscellaneous public calamities, although this assumption has no factual basis. In social life, however, perceptions and beliefs are as good as facts, since they become facts and have the same consequences. Thus, the daughters are seen as threats because they have learned to hunt by accompanying their father on his outings; and the unofficial "mar-

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riage" between the village headman's brother-in-law, Babun, and Silindu's older daughter involves a caste-difference that the villagers find unsavory. As for the younger daughter, they look upon *her* as positively unnatural when, having been forced into a marriage with the village doctor, she leaves him after their child is born and, to make matters worse, nurtures, even suckles, a young fawn that she finds in the jungle, as if she had produced *two* children. In one of the novel's most shocking scenes, the villagers stone the fawn to death and the daughter perishes soon after, having lost her will to live.

Silindu's older daughter is the next victim in a plot set into motion by a sleazy creditor named Fernando who craves sex as well as cash. When she rejects his advances he contrives with the help of the village headman to have both her husband and her father accused of theft. Babun, the husband, goes to jail while Silindu is acquitted, only to murder the false accusers in a rage of impotence and despair and a desire to protect his daughter from Fernando. While Silindu and his family have been picked off one by one as a consequence of the imperatives of their history—their fate, in other words—the novel draws to a close in a scene almost surreal in which Punchi Menika, Babun's loyal wife, is the family's sole survivor. In a collapsing house being pressed upon by the surrounding jungle, she realizes that she is about to be destroyed by a hungry animal.

The overriding emotion of this tale is the resigned helplessness of impoverished peasants in the face of uncontrollable forces. These forces, however, are products of social life rather than rays from the determining cosmos. The superstition of the villagers is hard to distinguish from socialization itself: it consists of an uncritical acceptance of social mores, a narrowly self-interested irrationality, a distrust of unconventionality. It has little to do with a jungle or with primitive society. Added to this are the insatiable desires for money, sex, and power which direct the behavior of the petty bureaucracy of local and regional chiefs. The cumulative force of all these lusts (the word's particular multivalence is exactly right here) produces the real operating fate that determines their sordid human destinies. The occasional introspective, questioning or

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self-determining person who arises in this milieu—the very milieu of social life—is hardly in a position to thwart such irresistible powers, and more often than not his or her special gifts precipitate the catastrophe. If this network of forces is socially determined rather than god-begotten, we should not be surprised by the effects produced when we witness its action in Western suburbia, in Putney outside London, to be exact. The result is a somewhat more elaborately orchestrated replay called *The Wise Virgins*, as the genre shifts from sophisticated folk tale to tragicomic novel of manners in the suburban marriage-market circa 1912.

Leonard Woolf's own family home in Putney is the model for the Richstead of *The Wise Virgins*. Although his father's early death had precipitated a move from their more affluent Kensington home in London proper, the novel presents us with a Davis family consisting of both mother and father, a son Harry and a daughter Hetty. Harry and Hetty are certainly derived from Leonard and his sister Bella, but to claim that they *are* those very two would be even more inaccurate than to claim that Stephen Dedalus *is* James Joyce. While it is true that Leonard's mother was greatly offended at what she took to be a portrait of herself, and while George Spater and Ian Parsons report, in *A Marriage of True Minds*, that "Leonard's mother and his sister Bella are treated roughly," it seems more accurate to say that the novel's counterparts are not simulacra of the originals, which may be the reason why his relatives were so offended: they took the portraits to be more literal than they actually are. Spater and Parsons add, moreover, that "Leonard treats himself equally harshly."

The novel tells the story of the newly arrived Davis family, who are Jews, and the growing friendship with their neighbors, the Garlands, who are suburban Anglicans. We witness a short period in the life of the intellectual and rebellious Harry, who yearns to leave the suffocating philistinism of Richstead society and become a member of the Bloomsbury circle of Camilla Lawrence, derived, of course, from the family and friends of Leslie Stephen. As he falls more and more deeply in love with Camilla, he is increasingly frustrated by her lack of sexual interest in him. At the same time, he is carrying on an ambiguous guru-student relationship with young Gwen Garland, who is dazzled by his penetrating criticisms of

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her mundane suburban existence. As their relationship becomes increasingly eroticized, they are driven to each other for sexual gratification, as a consequence of which Harry finds himself forced into a loveless marriage and the loss of Camilla Lawrence.

Surrounding *The Wise Virgins* are a host of problems and mysteries. Though one can only speculate about why Leonard Woolf began to write such a novel within a few months of his marriage to Virginia Stephen in 1912, the question is worth considering in view of the surprising fact that unlike their real life counterparts, Harry and Camilla do not get married at the end. That he wrote his second novel at this time may well be accounted for by his economic circumstances after resigning from the Ceylonese civil service in 1911 with the hope of marrying Virginia. But the psychological atmosphere that induced Leonard to write about his marriage at almost the same time it was taking place, and in such altered terms, has remained unclear. His failure to discuss *The Wise Virgins* in his autobiography, apart from a passing reference, suggests that the conflict it created with his family left a bitter taste in his mouth. He did not allow it to be reprinted after its 1914 appearance, nor was it published in America at all until 1979, under very different circumstances.

Thus, only a small body of critical response now exists, and most of it is unfavorable, though "platitudinous" might be a better word, since those who bother to attend to the novel at all keep making the same unsophisticated use of it as biographical source material. Spater and Parsons reflect the prevailing tone when they say, "Its interest today is in its portrayal of character, since the principal actors are Leonard and Virginia." (Though when Parsons writes by himself in his 1979 introduction to the novel, he is more enthusiastic.) Leon Edel treats it similarly in his book on Bloomsbury, while in an essay on *The Wise Virgins*, he dismisses the novel as "trivial" in a disappointingly inattentive reading of it as fiction. Even Selma Meyerowitz, in her full-length account of Woolf and his writings for Twayne, uses it mainly as biographical material, while grudgingly assenting to its "compelling development of the three main characters—Harry, Camilla, and Gwen—and some strikingly poetic description."

As biographical source, however, the novel is unreliable for

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the very reason that it is fiction. Harry, for example, is so aggressive, cynical and moody, so much at odds with the received assessment of Leonard, that the attempt to reconcile the two either falsifies his character in life or tears the novel to shreds. The task of the critic, however, is to explain why the characters and events of the novel differ from their sources in real life—not to explain these differences away or, even worse, explain why they really are accurate representations of their sources when in fact they are not. A demonstration case of the absurdities that follow from these latter courses can be seen in Roger Poole's programmatic book on Virginia Woolf, in which he prefers not to discuss aspects of the novel that might undermine his political interest in throwing mudpies at Leonard.

When *The Wise Virgins* is examined as a novel, however, a new entity altogether confronts us. Instead of the bits and pieces of biography that heretofore dominated the scene, we become aware of a theme and point of view that hold all of this material together as fiction. Leon Edel threatened to open things up when he finally asked but did not correctly answer the question: Who *are* the wise virgins? To answer that question correctly would go a long way toward revealing the thematic glue that makes this work a coherent—and sometimes powerful—philosophic novel of manners, a compact Bildungsroman. After all, its contemporary relatives are Joyce's *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* and Lawrence's *Sons and Lovers*. No busts of the gods would crash to the ground if Woolf's novel were acknowledged as their cousin.

II

Right from the first page of *The Wise Virgins* analogies are made between the jungle life that Woolf had recently left and the civilized suburbia to which he returned, setting the tone for a view of life as predetermined by powerful and irrational forces beyond individual control. That Richstead seems unmenacing only serves to underscore the forces behind the unwitting traps that human beings set for themselves via culture internalized as vague desires.

The Garland family—a widowed mother and her four "vir-

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gin" daughters—are getting to know their new neighbors, the Davises, who are just settling in. Harry is an artist, whose visits to art school serve the author as a pretext for acquainting him with Camilla Lawrence and her father, sister and friends, who distill much of the character and circumstances of Leslie, Virginia and Vanessa Stephen and their circle of Bloomsbury intellectuals. Harry, like a Proserpine commuting back and forth between the worlds of light and darkness, gradually makes his way into this Parnassian circle, the goal of his quest. But the task of the novel is to show how and why Richstead ordinariness—which he desperately hates—claims him in the end.

Although three of the Garland daughters seem merely peripheral, all four of them are indispensable to the working out of the novel's surprising web. Each exists in relation to the institution of marriage, Ethel and Janet as spinsters, May and Gwen as incarnations of nubility. Ethel, at 37, is universally regarded as a cheerful, pathetic and identity-less old maid, suited only to tea parties and volunteer work, now that life—in the form of a husband—has passed her by. Even to Harry's ruminating intelligence, Ethel is a puzzle. "What's she at? What does she think or feel? Is she satisfied with life, to go on like that year after year until she dies? She seems somehow to be cut off from all reality." On the other hand, when the two families dine together at a hotel, Harry is baffled "to notice that at dinner the only one to be really natural and comfortable was Ethel. She was not more talkative nor more silent than usual; always ready with her gentle smile. . . . in a silence infinitely more easy and reassuring than the rattle of Hetty's conversation. Her eyes never wandered, horribly fascinated by the forty eyes at the other tables; they never had to drop hastily or turn away flurried only to catch and drop before another pair of strange eyes; they were fixed in quiet abstraction—upon what?" On still another occasion when only Ethel appeared calm and natural, Harry thought to himself, "A foolish virgin." Ethel, it seems, is a dilemma.

Janet, somewhat younger, is both more and less of a puzzle.

> She was one of those female "sports" born into so many families in the 'eighties. . . . She played golf perpetually, tried to drop her

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> g's, and dressed in pleasant, rough grey tweeds. Hanging like Mohammed's coffin between the nineteenth and the twentieth centuries, between the soft, subservient femininity of Victorian women and the new woman not yet fully born, she compromised with life by finding it only in the open air and on the golf links. Life in return had made her singularly pleasant to look at; [sports] had hardened her muscles so that even under the rough jacket and rough skirt, which always looked as if it might at any moment change into trousers, one realised that there were human limbs; her face was startlingly and provocatively sexless; the feminine sex of the hair and the delicate texture of the skin cancelled out the male sex of the shape and expression, which were those of a boy of eighteen.

After Harry meets her, he remarks to Gwen, "Janet? she's a dear. . . . One doesn't pity Janet, she's a *lusus naturae*, she's happy. She's ancient Greece, Hermaphrodite, the soul of a young man of twenty in a woman of thirty."

Although May is important for the novel, she is herself of little interest beyond her personification of middle class nubility. Destined to marry a boring and fatuous clergyman (who is perfectly in tune with the suburban environment scorned by Harry), she and her tiresome husband will doubtless be popular residents of Richstead, reflecting as they do the respectabilities of bourgeois society. For Harry, May and her marital longings represent the culturally determined ordinariness that he cannot abide and from which it is his principal occupation to escape, preferably to the society of the Lawrences in Bloomsbury.

Gwen, the last of the daughters, suffers from the self-dramatized immortal longings of late adolescence and finds in Harry's dour, cantankerous, and anti-social posturings the answer to her romantic prayers. She devours his knowing comments about their world, reads with perplexity the Dostoyevsky and Ibsen that he recommends, and begins to see her bourgeois family life as commonplace and boring. But underneath it all, she is a realist whose motivation is ultimately to succeed in a conventional suburban environment. For all her flirting with "liberation" and Harry's exotic program for life, the music to which she is dancing is the same Richstead serenade as her sister May's. Sex and marriage, not Ibsenist new womanhood, heads the hidden agenda—and it's not very hidden.

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Harry is a surprisingly moody, brash, and even boorish young intellectual whose soul feeds on Continental literature, with Ibsen providing the serio-comic obbligato against which the plot is played out. Harry's alternations between stubborn silence and noisy fulmination against philistines, anti-Semites and suburban morality strike a sharp contrast with the Leonard Woolf of the autobiography, by then of course a venerable sage. But even Leonard's youthful letters to Lytton Strachey from Ceylon, among others, present us with a personality whose resemblance to Harry's is only *in potentiam.* Leonard indeed had elements of character that *could have* transformed him into a Harry under other circumstances, perhaps, but which erupted in force only on special occasions. Leonard's sister Bella confirms this view in Spater and Parsons' report that "she saw in Harry Davis all Leonard's 'less pleasant characteristics magnified to the nth power.'" She added (to Leonard), "If you had made—or would make—Harry really yourself you would make a fine thing of him." This assessment is particularly helpful in dealing with the problematic relation of Leonard to Harry—and autobiography to fiction—when reading *The Wise Virgins.*

Harry's obtrusive Jewishness, which is brandished at every inopportune moment, has been an insuperable stumbling block for many readers. Duncan Wilson, in his book on Woolf's political career, is one of the few who are calm enough about it to note that there is little sign of this Jewish unease in the autobiography, though Spater and Parsons do point out that Judaism had little real weight in his life. Although Woolf is always conscious of his Jewish roots and refers to them with an ambiguous satisfaction in the autobiography, he had little patience with religion in general or with folk sentimentality in particular. He connects the best qualities of his intellectual sensibility with Jewish tradition but at the same time he refuses to wear any mark of Cain, a specialty that he bestows on Harry instead.

Thus, Harry's obsession is all the more enigmatic. His constant anticipation of being treated as a scapegoat causes him to exhibit the very sort of baiting behavior most likely to elicit anti–Semitic retaliation. Yet even after such repeated ravings as "I'm a Jew, I tell you—I'm a Jew," or "We [Jews] wait hunched up, always ready and alert, for the moment to

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spring on what is worthwhile," he is consistently well-received by the friends he cares about the most. Woolf's delineation of Harry, far from being a self-portrait, makes a certain kind of Jew look bad. And in this, his purpose seems at one with that of Philip Roth: to castigate, from an insider's privileged position, the moral deficiencies of his own people.

Although some readers' attempts to equate Leonard with Harry in this regard are grossly defective, there is another area in which such an equation can be fully supported: the novel's sexual intensity. Neither the autobiography, nor *The Village in the Jungle*, nor Quentin Bell's recollections of Leonard in his biography of Virginia Woolf offers anything to contradict this impression of Leonard as a highly sexualized being. Harry's libidinous restlessness, often reminding us of Stephen Dedalus, provides a pervasive tattoo throughout *The Wise Virgins*. When Harry calls to mind the ambiance of Camilla's presence we almost feel that we are somewhere in Joyce's *Portrait*: "He liked to recall the purity of her face and her voice; the remoteness of a virgin, he said to himself. When one knows the coarseness and tortuousness of one's own mind, the foulness and ignobleness of one's own thoughts, he used to think to himself, such purity of beauty is almost frightening. One longs to be intimate with it, but is there any point of contact?"

This contrast between the sensuality of Harry and the "purity" of Camilla is at first a serious obstacle in the way of Harry's otherwise intense pleasure from Camilla's wonderful imagination and intelligence. In conversation with Arthur Woodhouse, another member of the Bloomsbury circle (modelled after Clive Bell), Harry responds most feelingly to Arthur's frustration at Camilla's coldness. Arthur's outcry, "They don't realize that we've got bodies," perfectly expresses Harry's own suffering, a suffering that eventually leads him into his disastrous liaison with Gwen Garland. Camilla's letter of response to Harry, after his expression of love and proposal of marriage (a letter bearing more than a casual resemblance to Virginia's well-known reply to Leonard's marriage proposal), sets forth the polarities as *she* experienced them: "I want love, too, and I want freedom. I want children even. But I can't give myself; passion leaves me cold. . . . And then

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there's so much in marriage from which I recoil. It seems to shut women up and out. I won't be tied by the pettiness and the conventionalities of life. There must be some way out." Although Harry is not yet aware of it, this is also his own view of marriage—a sexual trap—and his love for Camilla springs from an unconscious awareness that the core of their relationship would not burn out with the inevitable satiety of sexual desire. Marriage for sex frightens both of them, though sex in itself also frightens Camilla.

Given Harry's superior sense of security from the vulgar fates, it becomes the novel's central irony that something as commonplace as sexual desire should propel him into his involvement with Gwen Garland. And this central irony is doubly ironic, for Woolf's stand at the end of the Edwardian era was against sexual repression and hypocritical Victorian prudery. Both his narrator and his protagonist clearly speak for the author when they express, as frankly as conventions will allow, Harry's sexual needs. As Harry sees things, what "the male wants [is] a certain fierceness of love, mental and bodily." He notices the sensual leer on the face of the Vicar, Mr. Macausland, when he is examining his fiancée's appearance, and he knows that for all his celestiality, underneath, the Vicar is "mere man." When the two try to settle on an appropriate place to hold the Garland-Davis picnic, the Vicar objects to one possibility (amusingly, named Maidenhead) because it is notorious for lovers behaving passionately in their rowboats. And inevitably, when the picnic does take place, Harry and Gwen behold in a passing boat a young man who "had his arm around the girl's neck, and her arm was around his. He was kissing her on the lips." Harry's comment to Gwen, "That's one of the things worth doing," becomes a portentous refrain. His ability to express such a thought reveals a frank acknowledgement of sensuality that was only then beginning to be seen again in English literature, after a long moratorium. Throughout *The Wise Virgins* this frankness prevails, first in Harry and then in Gwen's decision to flout middle class convention by giving her virginity for love. Nor are these sexual needs suffused with Shelleyan mists but treated, rather, as everyday animal promptings. Once they are seen as physical itches devoid of "romance," Harry's pow-

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erful love for Camilla can also be seen for what *it* is: a profound devotion to her very being, not dependent on sex for its validation.

The late-twentieth-century reader is apt to understand this frank sexuality so well that he will end up misunderstanding how it actually operates in *The Wise Virgins*. For though Harry's outlook, like that of Stephen Dedalus, is meant to be taken as social criticism of a still repressive era, that is not its ultimate purpose. Frank sensuality may be an admirable quality in the protagonist as Ibsenist rebel and in the author as candid Modern. But in the context of the novel, it is Harry's security as a rebel against philistine culture that blinds him to an even more important consideration: can a gifted person achieve a superior life if everything is sacrificed for the scratching of a plebeian itch?

Harry is so fired up with his own bravado in telling Gwen about the Master Builder and other Ibsen originals that he fails to observe her fancying *herself* to be one of them. As she grows more desperate for love and attention, as her fears of being an old maid like Ethel increase, she determines to flout bourgeois convention by sacrificing everything for love, one of Harry's "things worth doing." Taking his ironical chatter most literally, she admits that she too feels "different." "But what can one do?" she asks:

> "Do?" he said violently. "Anything. What the devil does it matter what one does? Nothing matters, that's the first thing to remember in life, Gwen, except about two things."
>
> "But what are they, Harry?" Gwen asked almost timidly.
>
> Harry laughed. "You'd be shocked if I told you."
>
> Gwen flushed. "Don't say that. You know I wouldn't be. Do talk to me as you would to—to anyone [she means "to Camilla"].
>
> Harry looked up at her. "Do you mean that?" he asked slowly.
>
> Gwen was hot with excitement.

Trouble is already in the making, however, and an esthetic point of view like "Nothing matters!" can only increase it. Harry's subsequent suggestion that Ethel would have been better off bearing an illegitimate child is overwhelming, because Gwen is unable to intuit the avuncular, half-jocular tone with which he expresses his ambivalent, playful consciousness. As her feelings are stirred to fever pitch, she

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blurts out that Harry was right all along, that love *is* the most important thing, and that nothing else really does matter. She will leave her family, go away with him if he will take her, and if he won't, she will behave like an Ibsen heroine in any case.

Harry is caught unawares by the seriousness with which Gwen has absorbed his lessons. It has not occurred to him until now that there is an immense chasm between an intellectual and an ordinary person: for the former, it is perfectly clear what belongs to the world of thought and what belongs to the world of real life; for the latter, there is only one world: everyday reality.

> Harry covered his face with his hands; everything seemed to be whirling round him. He could think of nothing to say. One sentence only kept on absurdly coming again and again into his head: "People don't *do* those sorts of things." Ibsen, of course—Hedda Gabler. People don't *do* those sorts of things. Could he say that to Gwen—now? Wouldn't it, after the last week, sound too contemptible, too mean?—people don't *do* those sorts of things.

As a metaphysical gesture, Nothing matters! is not without merit; as a guide to daily life in conventional society, even Harry now recognizes its limitations. But things have gone too far for him to resist Gwen's erotic advances, especially when they are offered as a gift of one of those "things worth doing." After a night of lovemaking, followed by a day of euphoric exuberance from sexual release, Harry, like his counterpart Stephen Dedalus, falls into an abyss of panic and despair. Gwen's deep bond with her family overrides Ibsenist yearnings, turning her toward her mother in fear of what she has done. And Harry, who is really a decent sort when the crunch arrives, responds to the pressures of both families by offering to marry her.

What we now witness is the crushing weight, the sweeping tide of social convention. The reader will not easily forget Camilla's earlier response to Richstead suburbia when Harry had invited her for a visit: "Imagine those poor Miss Garlands waiting, waiting for those abominable young men in straw hats and that disgusting clergyman to come up and ask them to marry them." A nausea of tragic waste comes upon us as the wedding plans of May and Macausland are now re-

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vised to include a second couple, Harry and Gwen. It is the novel's cutting irony that Harry's most salient characteristics, his wide-ranging intelligence and his aversion to the commonplace, have amounted to little more than a piquant aphrodisiac for arousing the passion of Gwen. Sometimes the implacable Fates require grandiose machinery for crushing their helpless victims. The mountains labor to produce a mouse.

> So ended dreams and the romance of life [thinks Harry]. The brave, wild words, the revolt of youth, the splendour of love; the fringe of what he still saw fading away now in another world in Camilla; . . . False hopes and vain desires and absurd dreams and empty words, how they crumbled before the first touch of this world! How he despised himself, one of the ridiculous little souls, enmeshed, struggling feebly, stuck fast in the intricate sordidness of life.
>
> He sat there brooding over Gwen. Already she was his woman. . . . He watched her coldly, saw her already as *his*, his chattel, his wife, his dog. He did not hate her; he hated himself.

III

Why did Leonard Woolf choose to portray Harry as aggressively Jewish when he was not that way himself? Why did he not permit Harry to marry Camilla when he himself had married Virginia? Who are the wise virgins? And what do they know? These are the questions that require to be answered.

The wise virgins are a subject that the novel never discusses. Various of its young women are referred to as virgins and Ethel, as we have seen, has already been described by Harry as a foolish virgin. But the wise virgins *per se* are never brought on stage to do their thing. Still, we know who they are. They are Camilla, Ethel and Janet. Camilla's claim is beyond dispute, since she is treated throughout as a virtual goddess. But Ethel? And who was Janet, again?

As the story draws to its close at the Garland-Davis wedding, Harry meets Ethel once more:

> "Wish me luck," he said to her.
> "I do, Harry."
> They shook hands.

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"No oil in your lamp, Ethel. But who knows which is wise and which is foolish?" She did not understand what he meant, but she smiled at him, because he said such funny things. He shook hands with her again.

Then he meets Janet.

"I wish you luck," she said reticently, but not unkindly.
"I wish I knew what you really think about."
"Golf." There was a trace of contempt for him in her voice. It roused him.
"You despise me. I expect you're right."
She laughed. "My good fellow, don't let's get sentimental. I think: 'Poor Gwen,' if you want to know."

And then she goes on to add:

"You're a jolly sight too clever, Harry, that's what's wrong with you. . . . You think I've never thought about anything but golf. Oh, yes, you do. But I have. When I was eighteen I thought a jolly good deal too much about myself and what people thought of me. Then suddenly I found I was twenty-six and I thought an awful lot about what was going to happen to me. I'd rather be out of doors than in this"—she looked quietly round the drawing-room—" anyway. And to tell you the honest truth, I had rather be playin' golf this time next year than nursin' babies. I can't exactly explain what I mean, but you're so jolly clever I dare say you'll twig it."

Now Harry collides with Ethel one last time. " 'Good-bye, Ethel, good-bye.' Harry kissed Ethel, to her astonishment. 'You've been very nice to me,' he went on in a low voice, 'and you're wise.' "

In this remarkably oblique scene, major thematic strands have suddenly been gathered together. Only now is it apparent that both Ethel and Janet have resisted, each in her own way, the most powerful pressures of society upon its members in general and upon women in particular. The pressures of *their* class have been much harsher than those of Camilla's, where eccentricity is more easily tolerated. But in resisting the sexual and marital constrictions of their milieus, all three have chosen their own courses of life instead of caving in to the first "disgusting" young man to toss them a marriage bone. By the common standards of Richstead, Ethel may

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seem a vacant non-person, but Harry perceives her early on as contented and "natural," though still a foolish virgin. Not until the wedding reception does it strike him fully that she is more genuinely liberated than he is. Unlike Ethel, Janet and Camilla know what they are about and are able to explain it. But none of them will be thrown upon the scrapheap once they've done their procreative bit, for the wise virgins have rejected conventional sexual determinations, still very constricting for both women and men. Thumbing their noses at the gods, they continue to exist as individuals.

Leonard Woolf himself, always impatient with irrationality, sentimentality and religiosity, followed up his marriage to Virginia Stephen by producing *The Wise Virgins* as a gesture of thanksgiving. Sensing the most dangerous currents of his personality, he projected their terrifying fulfillment upon his protagonist alter-ego, Harry Davis. Virginia's sexual coldness had rescued him from the bitter fruits of a quest for sensual gratification that posed a dangerous threat. In its place she offered him a lifetime of intellectual pleasure. Leonard's feelings about sex were in any case highly ambivalent: as a passionate man he believed in sexual satisfaction and openness and rejected Victorian prudery and prurience. In his autobiography, he relates with distaste the smarmy atmosphere of one of his boyhood schools and describes how he and his brother cleaned the place up when they attained seniority. Leon Edel remarks in his Bloomsbury book, "Whatever Leonard's participation in the free Eastern sexual life of the towns [when in Ceylon], he returned to his sense of reality. . . . As he wrote to Lytton, 'I am beginning to think it is always degrad[ing] being in love; after all ninety-nine one hundredths of it is always the desire to copulate.' " In the *Growing* volume of his autobiography, Woolf recalls how a couple he knew in Ceylon had been changed by marriage:

> They reminded me of those pairs of insects—some are spiders or worms—in which a very small male is attached to a very large female—fitting ignominiously and neatly into her gigantic body—I sometimes think that this must be the ideal life for a male—and, after performing his male functions, is killed and eaten by her or just dies.

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Harry's fate was indeed like this one, not because Gwen was a monster, but because the lesson he taught her did not result in the liberation he fancied but rather entrained and trammelled him in a net of social conventions that Leonard could never have tolerated. Virginia prevented any of this from happening.

Harry's perfervid Jewishness represents a kind of parochial ingrowth for which Woolf felt a powerful disgust but which had not been outside the realm of possibility. Though his own family had not been bad for him, without resistance they might have been much worse. In his escape to Virginia and Bloomsbury, Leonard was able to become the more tolerant man of the world that his better self had always yearned to be. Harry Davis, seen in this light, is a brilliant creative act of antipathetic magic in which the most alarming and undesirable of the author's potentialities are sloughed off onto an effigy for sacrificial purification. Leonard had had stroke after stroke of good luck—and would continue to do so. But he knew that the universe couldn't be trusted, and that is why he had to believe that nothing mattered. Had a hair been different, had an electron vibrated once too much, his endowments might have turned him into a Harry Davis. But even with all of Virginia's afflictions, Leonard was able to recognize his privileged existence. After writing *The Wise Virgins* and examining what he had wrought, he could look at Harry Davis and think without hubris: There but for the grace of the implacable Fates go I.

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DAVID ROBERTSON

The Book of Proverbs

Three times I have sought within the territory of literary theory a vantage point from which the monotonous topography of the book of Proverbs became beautiful and its repetitious pieces of pithy advice formed part of a coherent landscape of truth. The first time was in the early 1960s. I was interested primarily in proverbial speech as a distinctive form of human expression (in contrast to, for example, prophetic or priestly ways of talking) and in the institutions of Israelite culture that cultivated and recorded such speech. The principles and methods of form criticism more or less informed my investigations. Each separate saying was cut by scissors out of its contextual setting and pasted onto a sheet with sayings similar in structure or content. The procedure produced some interesting statistics on the rhetorical strategies of the Hebrew sages and a few insights into their culture, but led to no "scenic turnout" from which the book itself became exciting literary or philosophical terrain.

I tried again during the early 1970s. This time I wanted to "read" Proverbs as one might read a novel or play. I listed and characterized its dramatic personae. I classified its images and charted its tropes. Most importantly, I tried to materialize a plot for it by a clever sleight of hand. Since it narrates no interconnected series of actions, I looked for a "thought" plot. I wanted to discover, playing subtly above its regular beat of one-line sayings, a sonata of ideas with several themes stated, developed, and recapitulated. I met with some success. I was sure I caught the strains of a plaintive melody of skepticism counterpointed against the main theme of gnomic orthodoxy. I thought I could also detect here and there modulation from a major key of confidence to a minor key of consolation.

Although not wholly disappointed with the results of my literary labors of the last two decades, I still felt unsatisfied. I

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was too preoccupied with content. I plucked proverbs out of context and re-shuffled them at will. Not only was I oblivious to what came immediately before and after individual sayings, I ignored completely the structure of the book as a whole. My reading of it was, therefore, superficial, as if I listened only to the sopranos sing the melodic line in a Handel oratorio. Then at the beginning of this decade, in connection with a project unrelated to biblical studies, I read three books by Robert Plant Armstrong: *The Affecting Presence* (University of Illinois Press, 1971), *Wellspring* (University of California Press, 1975) and *The Powers of Presence* (University of Pennsylvania Press, 1981). Armstrong is a cultural anthropologist who has developed in response to the culture of the Yoruba people of West Africa an extraordinarily complex and well–articulated theory of art. One of the most important aspects of his aesthetics is a distinction between synthetic and syndetic works of art. He first proposes this dualism in *Wellspring* and elaborates upon it in *The Powers of Presence*.

According to Armstrong "human consciousness seems capable of but two kinds of culture-creation: that which is accumulative, and that which is eventuating or organic." He labels the second of these two processes "synthesis":

> The synthetic work owns inherent principles of *development*. It proceeds through the execution and resolution of opposites. Its successive units are different from one another; and insofar as successive phases grow out of prior ones, the synthetic work is linear.

Most works of Western art, as well as most myths, stories, cosmologies, and histories are synthetic. Aristotelian plots (in which beginnings are connected with middles and middles with ends by continuous series of rationally coherent causes and effects), syllogisms (where conclusions follow logically from major and minor premises), and Hegelian logic (according to which thesis necessitates antithesis and together eventuate in a satisfying synthesis) are paradigmatic examples of synthesis.

Syndesis, on the other hand, proceeds by "accretion" and "repetition," "accumulation" and "proliferation." Whereas synthetic works of art are "consequential," syndetic ones are "sequential":

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> Growth [of a syndetic work] is through repetition of the same or of a small inventory of similar units. It does not *develop*; there is no entailment of the subsequent to be found in the prior.

Syndetic works begin *in medias res*, proceed by the abutment of one unit up against the preceding, and have the potentiality of continuing *ad infinitum*. They are by their very nature listlike. Lists consist of juxtapositions of co-equal parts; they are additive without a sum ever being arrived at; they are plotless, resolutionless, and climaxless. They are bits, atoms, electrons that do not revolve around a nucleus of coherent meaning. To people accustomed to synthetic works, which develop according to principles intrinsic to each work, syndetic works begin and end arbitrarily and grow gratuitously. Actually, they do neither; it is just that they are governed by principles extrinsic to themselves. Armstrong cites the example of Yoruba dancers:

> I have asked Yoruba dancers, whose movements are indefatigably repetitive, how they know when a dance is finished. They have responded that they ascertain this from the drums, but I have not found that the drummers recognize any necessary, developmental principle determining when they have achieved an entailed, organic wholeness and when they must therefore discontinue playing. . . . I suspect that the termination of a dance or of a session of music, in syndetic cultures, comes about from external (social) conventions or (individual) preferences, or from such other external factors as fatigue or boredom.

Perhaps the purest example of syndesis is certain types of African drumming. Armstrong comments:

> If a drummer beats a pattern of two beats against three, he repeats that pattern over and over again, and the happening of no particular subsequent beat can be said to have been entailed by its predecessor.

A great deal of modern Western art has a strong syndetic flavor. Collages in which whim plays a major role in selection and placement of elements, paintings like those of Andy Warhol which repeat in varying tints the same Campbell soup can or the identical smile of Marilyn Monroe, and novels constructed by the cut-and-paste method are good examples. Li-

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braries and museums, especially local ones where a minimum of critical judgment has been exercised in the selection or display of items, are illustrative syndetic institutions in Western culture.

As I read Armstrong it struck me that Proverbs is a syndetic work par excellence. The book as a whole is a collection of collections. The individual collections, together with their respective headings and a brief description of the type of units collected, are as follows:

1-9: "The proverbs of Solomon son of David, king of Israel"* [mostly long speeches by a wise father (teacher) to his son (pupil) or by personified Wisdom]
10-22:16: "The proverbs of Solomon" (one-line proverbs)
22:17-24:22: "Sayings of the sages" (multi-line and one-line proverbs)
24:23-34: "The following are also taken from the sages" (multi-line and one-line proverbs)
25-29: "The following also are proverbs of Solomon transcribed by Hezekiah, king of Judah" (mostly one-line proverbs)
30:1-14: "The sayings of Agur son of Jakeh, of Massa" (a speech, a one-line and a two-line proverb, and two lists)
30:15-33: (most numerical proverbs)
31:1-9: "The sayings of Lemuel king of Massa, taught him by his mother" (short speeches)
31:10-31: (an acrostic poem on the good wife)

At both the macro-level (the sequence of collections) and the micro-level (the sequence of units within each collection) number and order are essentially random. No collection follows from its predecessor or entails its successor. That the whole consists of nine collections (not seven or eleven), that the second collection contains 375 sayings, or that sayings of the sages are sandwiched between two separate collections of the proverbs of Solomon follows from no principle of meaning intrinsic to the book, nor do those facts and figures themselves generate meaning. When, on occasion, one does detect an intelligence at work shaping the contents, the effects are negligible: sayings are sometimes grouped according to content (16:10-15 have to do with kings); in general collections of

* All translations, unless otherwise noted, are from the 1966 edition of the Jerusalem Bible, published by Doubleday.

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sayings longer than one line are placed at the beginning and end of the book; and 1:1-7 is undoubtedly intended as an introduction to the book as a whole. Even the structure of the acrostic poem on the good wife is fundamentally controlled not by an idea in the act of taking shape but by the order of the letters in the Hebrew alphabet.

Proverbs is a list of lists whose units are itemized according to the principles of accretion, repetition, accumulation, and proliferation. The meaning of the book, therefore, remains constant through any possible permutation of the order of the collections or of the items collected. The book begins (after the formal introduction) anywhere, proceeds arbitrarily through a series of collections which are in turn arbitrarily arranged, and ends nowhere. The crucial point here is not that the character of Proverbs as a list of lists escaped my attention until I read Armstrong. I had noticed this fact long before but was disappointed. I considered it a fault in the book and a failure of imagination on the part of the ancient wise men. Seeing no way to get meaning out of lists, I turned my attention from form to content. Of course, what I meant by meaning was synthetic meaning. Armstrong gave me a name for the kind of form Proverbs has, showed me that many other works of art share this form, and, most importantly, demonstrated that a type of meaning is generated by this form that is quite different from the kind of meaning generated by works having a synthetic form. In short, I felt that an interpretation of the book on the basis of its form was opened to me. To that interpretation I now turn.

Space seems the right dimension and sight the right sense to seek metaphors for the type of meaning generated by synthetic art. Space seems to be a whole filled with bodies whose relation to each other we visualize in diagrams, as of the solar system. Synthetic constructs, like the syllogism, the sonnet, and Hegelian logic, are easily mapped on spatial objects like blackboards. Alternatively time is the preferred dimension and hearing the preferred sense for representing syndesis. We think of time as a series of moments most easily signified by a sequence of numbers or by sets of numbers. Instead of visualizing time we habitually hear it in the tick-tock of the clock and the beat of the drum. Whereas space seems always

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to be bound and to come already organized by its own built-in principle, gravity, time seems to recede forever in both directions and to have, in and of itself, no gestalt. By itself it is monotonous and uniform; whatever meaningful organization it has must be supplied by us. It provides the beat, we supply the off-beat; it provides the measure, we supply the tempo; it counts while we play the melody.

We experience time in everyday life as a sequence of activities that do not grow organically out of each other but rather abut one another. I fix breakfast, teach a class, catch up with correspondence over coffee, buy lunch from a machine, teach another class, bike home, go jogging, eat dinner, develop in the darkroom, and go to bed. None of these activities entails its successor or is entailed by its predecessor. Teaching a class does not grow consequentially out of fixing breakfast but follows it sequentially. The order is more or less arbitrary; the darkroom could be placed anywhere except after the bed. The set that is my day is not unified in and of itself but because I unify it. Time does not speed up of its own accord when I eat dessert or slow down on purpose the moment I lay me down and try to go to sleep.

We experience wisdom in very much the same way as we experience the day: it is occasion specific. Only fools generalize from one occasion to the next. When Epaminondas brings butter home from the store under his arm, it melts. "No, wrap it in wet leaves and put it under your hat," admonishes his mother. When he brings home under his hat a puppy wrapped in wet leaves, it suffocates. "No, bring it home on a leash," are the new instructions. But when he returns home dragging bread on a leash, it is gritty with dirt. Yes, it is folly to apply one wise solution to the next problem. Wisdom is best stated in a way that pays strict attention to this truth. So it is habitually expressed throughout the world in short pithy sayings we label variously proverbs, maxims, adages, or the like.

A collection of wise sayings inevitably resembles a cookbook. Each saying is like a recipe and the organization is by category: food, course, or occasion. The recipe for eggs Benedict does not grow organically out of the recipe for Huevos Rancheros; they are merely listed one after the other. The

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cookbook tells how to make both; aside from very general guidelines, it cannot tell when to make either. That decision is prior and cannot be generated from the cookbook; it must come from the reader and depends upon dozens of extra-culinary factors, like ethnic identity, leftovers, and guests, if any. So, in Proverbs, no saying follows from the one before it and leads to the one after it in anything other than a purely sequential sense. Therefore, the book cannot generate the type of meaning that can organize, direct, or synthesize one's life. Each saying is there on file, as it were, waiting to be relevant, and relevance depends upon matters extrinsic to the book itself. When circumstances call for a certain kind of wisdom, then one can look up in Proverbs a recipe for performing wisely in that situation. Suppose a stranger asks you to cosign a loan. Don't do it:

> Do not be one of those who go guarantor,
> who go surety for debts:
> if you have no means of paying
> you will find your bed taken from under you.
> 22:26-27

Imagine you are invited to dinner by a rich and powerful person. Watch how much you eat:

> If you take your seat at a great man's table,
> take careful note of what you have before you;
> put a knife to your throat
> if you are prone to gluttony.
> 23:1-2

Meaning in a syndetic work like Proverbs is generated by the coincidence of saying with the situation of the reader. Meaning is actualized when the reader selects a part of the book and applies it, just as a meal is realized when a cook selects a recipe, cooks the food, and serves it.

A person seeking guidance from Proverbs on a specific matter will usually receive fairly straightforward advice. That is not always the case, however. Take Proverbs 26:4-5, for example. These two verses present *in extremis* the problem facing the reader of the book. It is as if a cook wanting to pre-

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pare eggs Benedict opens a favorite cookbook only to find placed side by side without mediating comment two wildly different recipes:

> Do not answer a fool in the terms of his folly
> for fear you grow like him yourself.
> Answer a fool in the terms of his folly
> for fear he imagines himself wise.

The tension between these two sayings cannot be resolved by a synthetic strategy. The sayings before them do not prepare for them, nor do the sayings that follow treat them as thesis/antithesis by providing a synthesis. The opposing pieces of advice are simply set there side by side. If you are faced with fools announcing their folly, what do you do: answer them or not? It will do no good to look elsewhere in Proverbs for help. The decision can only come from you according to your knowledge of yourself and the fools in question, your grasp of the situation, and your understanding of human nature.

Proverbs purports to teach wisdom, yet verses 4 and 5 of chapter 26, because they present an unmediated choice, make it clear that one must already be wise to know how to choose between its competing bits of wise advice. In fact, it seems that any collection of wise sayings presumes that the reader possesses an antecedent wisdom, namely, the wisdom to match situation with saying. Yet, in a very important sense, one can never know enough to know whether to answer the fool or not, for the correctness of any particular decision depends partly on the outcome. Only time will tell. That is, whether one makes a wise decision will appear only in retrospect. Here we arrive at one of the limits of Practical Reason. In morality often a choice is right regardless of consequences. In practical matters, however, rightness depends upon outcome and so is never wholly knowable in advance. If in answering the fool I play the fool's game, so that others cannot tell us apart (as people could not in the end tell Mountie from Dukhobor), then I have made the wrong choice. Because of the syndetic character of Proverbs, it tosses back to its readers the problem of matching saying to situation and so ultimately places them between the rock of having to make choices and the hard place of inherently being unable to

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know ahead of time which option is the wise one. It follows that doing wisely is not entirely under human control. The sages who wrote and edited the book came to this same conclusion. They included several sayings that allocate to human beings the proposing but to Yahweh (the ancient Jewish personal name of God) the disposing of any action. Where they said Yahweh we would more likely say Fate, Fortune, or Chance:

> Man's heart makes the plans,
> Yahweh gives the answer.
> 16:1

> On the breast the lot is drawn,
> from Yahweh the decision comes.
> 16:33

> The horse is caparisoned for the day of battle,
> but to Yahweh the victory belongs.
> 21:31

The way meaning is generated in the book of Proverbs (by an agent choosing from a list of recipes the one to be actualized) opens the door to miscalculation and chance. These mark the boundaries of its wisdom in the direction of the specific. The overall form of the book (an additive list without a sum) establishes the borders of its wisdom in the direction of the general. It will never make a whole sense, and so it can never make sense of life as a whole. Its verses will never add up to a coherent, general Truth that can give general directions to life. Anyone reading it in order to learn how to be wise in general will find paradoxically that the only generalizable truth it contains is that wisdom cannot be generalized. Whether Proverbs is syndetic because the practical life is itself necessarily syndetic is an open question. Everyday life may be essentially listlike, incapable of being organized according to general principles that can be applied deductively to specific situations. That practical advice is often given in short sayings with limited applicability strongly suggests this is the case. If so, then the book of Proverbs is truly a mirror of life. Succinctly put, its message is this: fools add life up and then swallow it whole; sages, on the other hand, take it bit by bit.

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KERMIT MOYER

Tumbling

Early one rainy morning just about a week ago, Jack and me were sitting in a laundromat in this little town where we'd spent the night in an unlocked car. We sleep in cars a lot of times, it's not as bad as you might think. A little cramped maybe, but if there's a radio and a key to make it work, we don't mind too much. Like that night we were in a big new-smelling Cadillac in a used car lot. Jack said they could make it smell that way with an aerosol can. Plenty of room and everything clean and shiny. The radio picked up stations from as far away as Chicago and Ft. Wayne, Indiana, and we sang along with the top-forty and listened to one of those shows where people call in. Jacky tried to get a station from back home to see if there was anything on about us, but he couldn't find one. He said the signals were probably too weak to reach as far as we were by then. He was sitting behind the wheel smoking Camels because it was Daddy's brand. I hated for him to get that clean ashtray dirty. I don't know why. I said we should think of the folks that might want to buy that car. Jack just laughed and said maybe a few cigarette butts might give them a chance to think about us. But wouldn't that be leaving evidence? I said. That's one of the things Jacky talks about sometimes: covering our tracks, he calls it. He wipes our fingerprints off the radio knobs and the steering wheels, and he's always careful to use a handkerchief to open and close the doors. Well, that morning dawned so rainy-gray and drizzly you didn't even want to move. Jacky let me sleep with the duffelbag for a pillow and I just rolled myself up with my hands pressed between my knees and tried to keep what was happening in my dream from slipping away. It was a birthday party and it was you, Mom, not Jacky, helping me blow out the candles. I was wearing my blue print dress with the puffy sleeves and the white lace collar, and Jacky was saying, "Let me, let me." There was pink icing on

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the cake and I wanted to see if maybe Daddy was there too. I thought he might be because we were still little in my dream. But Jack was shaking my shoulder and telling me to rise and shine, we had to get out of there before they opened up. So I combed my hair in the rearview mirror, and then we scooted out and found this laundromat, which was either already open or else hadn't ever closed. We were wet from the rain by that time, so we got behind the machines and changed into some dry clothes. We put a wash in and then just sat around, watching the raindrops slide down the windows and reading magazines. We had the place all to ourselves, and it made me feel kind of blue, looking out at nothing but the rain and two or three parked cars. There was a Woolworth's right across the street that hadn't opened up yet. It was only about six o'clock in the morning. I could see a BACK TO SCHOOL sign in one window and I wondered if come September we'd be going back to school or not. My dream was still with me, too, but all scattered and floating away from where it came from. A foggy picture would come in front of my mind's eye, and I'd think it was something I was about to remember, something that really happened, and then I'd realize it was only my dream, and that'd make me feel like I'd lost something. The fat sound of the washer going chugga-*whoosh*-chugga-*whoosh* and the little pinging noise of the dryer had put me into sort of a hypnotic trance anyway. But not Jacky. He was reading a *Time* magazine, making noises to himself whenever he'd find something interesting. "Hey, listen to this," he says. "Remember what I told you? *Scientists now believe that the universe has been expanding from a single fixed point for millions of years. If we trace back the motion of the galaxies, we arrive at a point in the distant past when they were a single unified mass, a time when the universe must have been very different from its present disseminated state.*" I turned away from the window and said, "What do you mean, 'Remember what I told you?' I don't remember anything like that." "Come on, Jill," he says, "everything's always moving away, I always said that, and we're going against the current anytime we try to keep them, you know, from flying apart, or anytime we try to get them back together again. That's why it's so hard, and that's why we have to be so careful all the time." "Oh, yeah," I said. "Sure. We're just like the galaxies."

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It was right then that this big fat lady comes into the laundromat. She's got a whole wicker basket full of dirty laundry, so she pushes the door open with her shoulder and sort of backs in. When she turns around and sees us she flinches. "Land sakes," she says. "You give me a fright. I never expected a soul in here this early." Her face was one of those bright lit-up country kind with rosy apple cheeks—made red from bunches of tiny little broken veins I saw later—a face just as shiny wet from the rain as if she'd been crying her eyes out, except she looked so pleased with everything you couldn't believe she'd even know how to cry. She had round arms with freckles and her hair was just like yours, Mom—reddish strawberry-blond—all twisted up in braids at the back of her head and against her neck. I was glad she was here because now I thought maybe I could get out of feeling so blue. Jacky'd be sure to put on one of his shows, and that meant I'd have to play along. Which usually I get a kick out of. Anytime we talk to somebody I have to wait and see who we're going to be this time. Real life is always so ordinary on the one hand and so complicated on the other, but Jacky's stories can make it all seem just as simple and easy as filling in a coloring book. "Can you tell us about how far we are from the Maryland line?" he says. The fat lady is still standing there with her arms hooped around this big basket of laundry. Jacky's got that funny way of being able to get your attention, and I could see her sort of tilt her head like she's having trouble hearing what he's trying to tell her. She says, "Not far—only about fifty miles, I guess. Just take Route 15 south out of town. Do you all have family in Maryland?" Jacky looks up at her and directly into her eyes. He sort of waves his hand over toward me and says, "This is Peggy Sue." *Peggy Sue*? I thought. He's got to be kidding. I just sat there with my hands folded in my lap and looked sort of lost—which was easy enough because that's just exactly how I felt, we'd been on the road almost two weeks by then, sticking to the backroads. In a way I was in the same boat as the fat lady, just waiting to find out what the story would be so I could play along. So then Jack says, "We're on our way to Maryland to get married." I closed my eyes for a second and tried to take that one in. When I looked up, the fat lady is staring at me and resting her basket on the Formica table between the

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row of washers on one side and the row of dryers on the other. "Why, you're just kids," she says. If I turned slightly toward the window, I could see my reflection in the glass. It was all wavery from the rain. "Just a couple of kids," she says. I'm watching her in the reflection on the window and I can see right through her to the five-and-ten across the street. "You don't want to hear any of this," Jacky says. He's staring down at his hands and shaking his head back and forth. I can see him in the window too—our reflections are clear and sharp but the raindrops, sliding crooked down the glass, make everything outside blurry. "Look here," she says out of the blue, her head tilted and her voice going all kindly and soft. "You're in a family way, isn't that right child?" When I turned around she was watching me with a sly, sort of happy look. Jacky sits up straight, like he's suddenly got everything under control. "We're all right. We can take care of ourselves," he says. The fat lady's watching Jacky again, and she narrows her eyes and says, "How old are you kids? Where're you from?" "We're old enough, you don't have to worry about that," Jacky says right away. Then he says, "At least we're old enough in Maryland—we're just passing through here." He got that line from a movie we'd seen where somebody had to go to Maryland to get married because they were underage. We go to movies a lot on the road, for the simple reason that movie theaters turned out to be a good place to spend the night. "What about you?" she says to me. "Are you old enough too?" I circled my arms around my stomach and said, "It looks like I am." The fat lady nods her head and turns back to Jacky. "Well then I guess you better get yourselves a map the next time you fill up," she says. For a second it looked like that was the end of the conversation, but then Jacky says, "We're not driving, we don't have a car." He stops short, and then he blurts out, "We've been hitchhiking." Which was true enough, that's for sure—one of the problems is being too young to have a driver's license much less a car. All we have is the money we got from cashing Daddy's check—which I'm real sorry about, Mom, but Jacky made out a good case it was his and mine in the first place. And we decided, or rather I should say he did, that we'd pretty much have to forget about riding on buses or trains or anything like that because otherwise we'd be sure to get picked up. So

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there we were sitting in a laundromat at six in the morning. For some reason, I remember, I kept listening to the rain. The light in that laundromat was real yellow against all the gray outside, and since this fat lady came in, the sound of the rain made it, I don't know, sort of cozy and warm-feeling somehow. "So you'll be looking for a ride then I guess," she says to Jacky. "I want you to know I think you're dong the right thing. I know it's bound to be hard for a spell, but you'll be just fine if you really love one another." She smiles in a way that makes it hard not to believe her. I immediately started to brighten up. Then she says, "Are you hungry, have you two had any breakfast yet? You must be starved." I felt like we were turning a corner when she said that. I don't know why, except it made me think of you asking that same question the time you didn't get back from your date until early Sunday morning and we were already up. You were still dressed fancy from Saturday night and you tried to tell us you'd been to church already. I could just see you in that navy blue cocktail dress with the bow at the bust whipping up jelly omelets and French toast and once in a while tossing your hair out of your eyes the way you do when your hands are full. Standing by the stove in your stocking feet after you'd kicked off your heels. Remembering that made me feel like a little kid, and here I was supposed to be pregnant and everything. When we don't answer her, the fat lady looks at Jack and tells him, "You need to make sure this girl eats on a regular schedule. She's a little lady now, and she'll have to keep her strength up." Then she turns to me and says, "Don't worry, I wouldn't tell your secret to a soul, but you'll have to eat enough for the baby too, that's the first thing." She smiled and I nodded and she says, "Good. Now just let me get this wash started. Our dryer's all right, but the Bendix's been on the fritz, so here I am. Well. We'll have to see about getting some nourishment into you. It's not healthy to be as skinny as you are in your condition." To tell the truth, I *was* just about starved, and I was also glad to let this fat lady take charge for a while—even if it was under false pretenses. I was avoiding Jacky's eyes because I didn't want to be reminded of that at all. I just wanted to be taken care of for a little while. Maybe I'd even get to take a bath. In my dream there were lots and lots of candles on the cake even though we were little, and

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when I couldn't blow them all out you blew out the rest, so I knew all my wishes were going to come true. Jacky was crying and he kept saying, "Let me, let me," but that didn't really matter. The feeling I had in my dreams was this: I didn't know what my wishes were, but I just had a feeling they were all going to come true.

I think it was something about the fat lady herself that made Jack come up with that particular story. The trick Jacky has is he can pretty much hook up the right story with the right person. He just lets them make it up with him. That's where the fat lady was a natural. She really loved the idea of us running off because we had to get married. It might be a speck scandalous, she said, but that's all right, these things always happened this way. She expected we'd be as happy as anybody else and, besides, the baby was a sure sign. So now I had to play my part in this hot teenage romance she and Jack cooked up. Star-struck lovers and everything. And that's probably right where it all started, from then on it's just been one thing after another. Like running off to find Daddy in the first place. If you look at it from a distance, I guess it's pretty ridiculous. But each step of the way it seemed perfectly natural and, the funny thing is, after a while the reasons why hardly seem to matter. I knew you'd be worried about us, but I also knew you'd be all right and I wasn't so sure about Jacky. And anyway at first I thought I'd be able to steer him home before you even got back from your weekend in the city. But the plan of how to do each step of the thing somehow took over. Each step always makes sense—even if the whole thing doesn't. Daddy's supposed to be in Brunswick, Georgia, so that's where we're going. And of course running off was a good way to make you feel sorry too. Jacky's sure you spent the weekend with that guy from work, the one that brought you home after the office party. I guess you never knew it, but Jacky saw the two of you kissing or something in the kitchen that night. Those things don't matter to me, but where you're concerned Jacky can't even stand the idea of stuff like that. So going off to find Daddy was a bright light for Jacky—he *had* to follow it. And I just had to go along. I guess I've always felt like I had to look after Jacky, even if he is eight minutes older than me. I don't only mean take care

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of him exactly—I mean more like I have to follow him with my mind and with my feelings. He gets so worked up about stuff sometimes, and really, things like that just never mattered to me. What's actually happening matters a lot more than anything you might merely think about it, don't you agree?

You should have seen the fat lady's house. But of course she wasn't the fat lady by then. We found out her name was Mrs. Spicer, and she had a whole flock of kids, most of them grown now, and grandchildren—the youngest was only about four years old. Well, it didn't take long before Jack had Mrs. Spicer eating out of his hand. He'd tease her and make her laugh and pretty soon she's treating him like he's her favorite son or something. But I don't think she ever pictured me as one of her daughters though. I was more like somebody she used to be herself, that's what she told me. We got in the front seat of this Chevrolet station wagon she had, and then she drove us just barely outside of town to a big old pink house with blue shutters and lots of peaks and chimneys and three wide porches, a screened one up on the second floor just for sleeping—all of it set back on a low hill you couldn't even see from the highway because of all the trees. Everything surrounded by cornfields and peach orchards and a flower garden big enough to walk through, almost like a little park. Just to get there you had to go up a long driveway, really an actual road, between tall rows of evergreen trees. We weren't that far from the mountains—Jacky'd pointed them out from the road, and I'd already felt the temperature drop. He showed me on the map how close we were to where the color changed from yellow to long fingers of brown. Those were the Blue Ridge Mountains, he said. One of Jacky's ideas was to take the Appalachian Trail down to Georgia. Brunswick's over on the coast though, about an inch-and-a-half down from Savannah. According to the mileage chart, an inch-and-a-half is about seventy-five miles. Jacky kept changing his mind between going through the mountains and then cutting east along what he called "Sherman's march to the sea" or going along the coast through all the Navy bases and ocean cities as we made our way down to Brunswick. It was a hard decision, and we were right at the turning point

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that day. He liked to read out the names of the towns and cities between here and there, saying them over while he moved his fingertip along the different paths: Winchester or Norfolk? Asheville or Southport? Atlanta or Charleston, South Carolina? Jacky always pays attention to the names of places. To Jacky it's like the name of each little town we come to—especially if they have funny ones like Buffalo Mills or Mann's Choice or Rainsburg, Pennsylvania—like each little town is his to put away and keep, or like us just knowing the names of those places is what's making them come true. That's why I thought we might end up going east after all: there's just more names in that direction, and going off toward the blue edge of the map seemed more definite to Jacky than just trailing down through the mountains, I could tell. I was sure hoping so anyway, even though I never imagined for a minute we'd find Daddy that way either. I just figured if we stayed close to people we'd be okay, but if we went off into the woods who knows what might happen? We don't even have sleeping bags, just a worn-out Navy blanket and that ratty old wedding-ring quilt you remember was my favorite. I like woods and open country, but what I like best is coming into a town, seeing the billboards, passing the first house with a painted fence and a mowed lawn, then maybe coming to an Esso station and a Dairy Queen. We'd always stop for one of those ice-cream cones with a curl-on-the-top, and Jacky'd already be studying the map, looking for the crookedest line between this town and the next one and licking away at the mustache of vanilla on his upper lip.

We stayed with Mrs. Spicer for two entire days, and during the whole time Jack was Buddy and I was Peggy Sue. That's one of our favorite songs, "Peggy Sue," and those names were sort of a secret joke to Jacky. He especially liked it that Mrs. Spicer probably never even heard of that record or of Buddy Holly either (which I found out later she had, on her own radio). I keep hearing that song in my mind because of those names—*I love you, Peggy Sue, with a love so rare and true, uh-oh Peg-gy, my Peg-gy Sue-uh-ooo, uh-ooo-ooo.* That's what I mean about the way Jacky can always get you to thinking exactly what he wants. I mean it was fine with me, that's what we'd been doing all along anyway—and it's fun too, always

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acting out some story or other. Jack says we have to stay incognito because we can never be sure if anyone's after us or not. We're runaways, he says, and it's safer to keep changing identities. Sometimes I'm his sister and other times I'm not—sometimes I'm his sidekick or his leading lady. But there's always some story going along with it. Even looking for Daddy. That's real, I guess, I mean that's something we're *doing*, but it's really just another story too. The stuff that actually happens, day by day, that stuff doesn't have anything to do with Daddy. Like Mrs. Spicer. Can you feature her taking us into her bedroom to ask us about our "hygiene practices"? That's what she called it. She said we were right to leave such things up to God Almighty. She said she thanked the Lord for all of her children. She wasn't a heathen and she could see we weren't either. "Oh, yes Ma'am," Jacky says, looking over at me sort of moony. "Our love is holy, we know that." Mrs. Spicer just widens her eyes and says, "Amen."

After we got to her house that first morning, she fixed us some corn fritters—these little things like pancakes with whole kernels of corn in them—all we could possibly eat—along with thick country sausage and a big round blue pitcher of milk. We always use the carton at home, so I remember that pitcher, round as a peony and with a kind of pinched-in spout like a flower petal. It was the sort of thing anybody'd love to have themselves someday—that house too, lots of nooks and crannies, so perfectly homey you could hardly believe it, little touches like embroidered cushions on the window seats of these bay windows at all the stairway landings—I bet the house Jacky and me are staying in right now used to be a lot like that, except this one's falling apart and there's no furniture to speak of, only this broken-down rocking chair I'm sitting in and what we managed to pull together out of cardboard boxes and some old wooden milk crates Jack found in the cellar. But I'm sure this used to be a really fabulous mansion though, back in the Gay Nineties or the Roaring Twenties or whatever. We're right next to the ocean, I can hear the surf against the stone wall across the road this very minute. Maryland, or maybe Delaware, I think. It's hard to know exactly which state you're in where we are now.

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You might have liked Mrs. Spicer, she was wonderful in a lot of ways, but I doubt that you would have. You don't like anybody sitting in judgment all the time, no matter how kindly they try to tell you what you're doing wrong. I'm like you, my feeling is: whatever anybody else says, I've got my own reasons. But even if Mrs. Spicer could get on your nerves a little bit, you still had to hand it to her. Picture this: the three of us're sitting in this big old country kitchen—four long windows looking out on a vegetable garden where you can see bulging red tomatoes in chicken-wire cages and leafy, purple-colored cabbages. Copper pots and pans are hanging on the wall, and there's this great stone fireplace. The kitchen table's covered with a bright blue-check oilcloth. We're just finishing breakfast and Jack's drinking a cup of coffee—which he taught himself to like after we went on the road, the same with smoking. It goes along with his idea of how he ought to be. So Jacky's drinking his coffee, and Mrs. Spicer's over at the sink looking through the window at something outside. She leans up against the rim of the sink and raps on the middle part of the window—it's open at both the top and the bottom—and she calls out through the screen, "Here, Wendell, you better let sleeping dogs lie—old Bertha's not going to like that. Why don't you and William go on over to your tree house and read some comic books?" Over her shoulder she says, "William's from down the road, he just got a new tricycle." Then through the screen she calls, "You heard me now, you better not tease Bertha like that—" and from over on the other side of the kitchen, farthest from the sink, a deep voice pipes in: "Oh, Mama, let 'em be. A little scrimmage with Bertha might do 'em good." When I turned around to see who's here now, I notice Jacky's still got his eye on Mrs. Spicer. Before he looks he's waiting to see what her reaction's going to be, just as crafty as a fox. I figured whoever's in the doorway's probably Mister Spicer, which it turned out he was, only not Mister but Major. I'm just trying to kind of slide a glance by him, I don't want to give anything away, but he locks onto my eyes, bang, and gives me a big wink—like we know a secret that makes everybody else look like fools, or like he's telling me this fat lady's harmless so we might as well play along. When I look back down at my plate, I see there's only a stub of fried sausage left—which I stick with my fork and smear

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around in the maple syrup before putting it in my mouth. Mrs. Spicer was a great cook, you'd have thought so too—that sausage was probably the best I ever had, and the corn fritters were entirely out of this world. We'd been pretty much living on french fries and popcorn and Coke for days by then. I'm starting to pour myself some more milk from the blue pitcher, when Jacky stands up and says, "Good morning, Sir!"—like a military cadet or something. That's exactly how long it took Jacky to figure him out. "At ease, son, at ease," the guy says. "Sit down and finish your coffee. And you, young lady," he says to me, "you must be Little Sister, is that right?" I smiled and shook my head and waited for Jack to explain our story, but he never had to—Mrs. Spicer charges right in and does it for him, all in one breath nearly, leaving out the part about me being pregnant, and finishing up with, "So I thought you might take them down to Hagerstown on Saturday when you and Sam Healey go in to the races." Then she turns toward us and says, "This is my husband, Major Spicer." "Pleased to meet you, Sir." Jacky chimes in right away, offering his hand. I said, "Same here," and gave him back a wink of my own. I don't know why. I guess I thought at least the two of us might have our feet on the ground, even if nobody else did.

It turned out I was wrong about that—was I ever—but the guy did give you the impression of being absolutely no-nonsense and in-charge—very distinguished looking, but with this crinkly little smile around the edges that seemed to bring him right down to earth and make it sort of a joke that anybody of our intelligence, his and mine I mean, would actually have to tolerate the kind of foolishness we had to put up with. I mean you felt like he was including you in the winner's circle with him—at least that's how he made me feel. And then the story Mrs. Spicer reeled off was such a crock of beans. I mean talk about corny, I thought the Major'd see right through us in a flash and pretty soon we'd be on a bus back home. But instead, he says, sort of sly like he knows it's all just so much bull but he likes the careful planning it takes anyway, he says, "Well, well, I see," and puts his hands behind his back. He's got a newspaper rolled up in one fist and he rocks back on his heels and taps his leg with it—this way you can tell he's

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thinking, like when he'd smoke his pipe and you'd know it'd be an interruption to say anything to him. "I see," he says again, and, "Understood," like he's really thought it through. "Mind you," he says, "I don't necessarily agree with you in principle, but if that's your choice, I have to admire your tactical skills. Did Mrs. Spicer say you found her—or, I'm sorry, *she* found *you*—at the laundromat in town? Have I got that right?" He's looking at Jacky, but then his eyes shift back to mine like he's giving me a signal. That's when I started giggling, I mean I couldn't help it, even though there was supposedly nothing at all to laugh about—so I started coughing instead. Major Spicer steps over beside my chair and starts patting me on the back, like congratulations or something, and that makes it even funnier. So to stop laughing, like I've got to clear my throat, I take a sip of milk—which of course is a big mistake. The next second I'm spitting a white stream across the table, holding onto the edge and wrinkling up the smooth oilcloth to keep from falling over. Jack's wiping milk off his face with a blue napkin, real cloth, and he's glaring at me, and the Major's stroking my back now, almost like some guy looking to see if you're wearing a bra, and saying, "That's all right, go ahead and laugh, Little Sister. It's a good release." That's what he called me the whole time, except maybe once—"Little Sister." Did he know me and Jacky weren't really lovers but brothers and sisters instead? Maybe not, but he sure gave you the feeling that whatever anybody else said, it was all just so much bull—you and him knew what the real score was. But keeping up appearances was part of the game, like one of the rules or something. I mean he never said anything rude and he never lost that stiff Army posture of his either, the way he'd bend over from the waist, his back just as straight as a doll's anytime he'd reach down to scratch one of the family dogs or cats that were all over the place, laying around with their heads on their paws or sitting there staring up at you like you're going to give them something good, maybe a crunchy dog biscuit or a pat on the rear. It was real homey the way the dogs rubbed up against you, panting and grinning like they were just tickled to death you were there. If you think the yellow light in that laundromat was cozy, this was something entirely else. After a while that house really gave you the feeling of living in a beehive—Mrs. Spicer was

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this bustling queen bee with all these other bees buzzing around making honey—and Major Spicer off to one side, maybe, like the beekeeper with the net helmet to keep the bees from stinging him and getting in his eyes. Nothing ever really seemed to faze Major Spicer—no matter what crazy stuff was going on, he was above it all, outside of it entirely. For instance, the next thing we knew there was a lot of barking outside and some little kid is screaming his head off, but the Major doesn't even move. "There, what did I tell you?" Mrs. Spicer says. "Bertha won't put up with that kind of nonsense, they should have known better." Major Spicer laughs and says, "If they don't, they're finding out now, aren't they? Experience, Rhea, that's the only way we ever learn anything in life—as our adventurous young couple here bear witness. Those boys will pay closer attention in the future. A good object lesson if you ask me." Mrs. Spicer might have been listening to all this but I doubt it—she was already on her way out the door. In another second we could see her through the window waving at little Wendell and William with a broomstick she must have picked up on the back porch. We couldn't see the kids from where we were, but we could sure hear them. The barking had stopped as soon as Mrs. Spicer yelled, "*No*, Bertha, *bad* dog," but the screams were just getting louder, and we could hear the other kid, who turned out to be Wendell, the four-year-old, saying things like, "I *told* him *not* to," and "we didn't even *touch* her, we just wanted to *play*." Mrs. Spicer bangs the broomstick down on the porch and says, "Mind your own business, Sir, and leave Bertha to mind hers," and in a different voice she says, "There, there, you're all right, William, Bertha's not going to bite you." Major Spicer is chuckling and he's still standing beside me with his hand on my shoulder. I could smell his particular odor, like the smell of a pillow, beneath the other odor of tobacco and Old Spice Shaving Lotion that I can recognize anywhere and that always makes me think of Daddy. His fingers were absent–mindedly stroking the back of my neck under my hair, the same way you might pet a dog. It didn't feel personal at all, just friendly and offhand, so I didn't mind it, I like to have the back of my neck stroked, who doesn't? But Jacky looks over and lifts his eyebrows, so when I see nobody's looking, I stick my tongue out at him. Jacky just smiles and

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shakes his head like as far as he's concerned I'm some kind of moron. That look of his always makes me mad, but in one way I guess it turned out he was right. And I have to admit I never expected anything like what happened—in fact, I get so embarrassed I feel like one big blush whenever I think about it. This is getting into the stuff I'm not sure how to put in my letter—if Jacky ever lets me write one. The thing is, I don't want to just break the news to you, I want to tell you exactly how everything actually happened so you'll see it wasn't really anybody's fault. I mean finding fault is just picturing things according to some story where one way is automatically right and the other way is automatically wrong, but what I'm saying is that these particular things just naturally happened the way they happened, that's all. It made me feel sort of confused, but, honestly, in another way I really didn't mind, I was following right along with it. That was the next afternoon, after we'd spent the night there and eaten four more meals: lunch and dinner the first day, and then another breakfast and another lunch the next. Mrs. Spicer came up with the solution of whether she should let me and Jacky sleep together—because of course we weren't married yet, even if I *was* supposed to be pregnant. What she did was put us in bunk beds out in the sleeping porch with about half-a-dozen visiting grandchildren. It would've felt like a summer camp except it was all one big family, and they treated Jacky and me just like honorary members of the tribe. Major Spicer even asked me to say grace over lunch the next day. We were sitting at a long oval-shaped table, Jacky and me and about umpteen grown-ups and kids, out on what they called the dining porch. In front of us were these big yellow bowls of chicken-corn soup—really more like a chicken and corn and dumpling stew (Mrs. Spicer said they always ate a lot of corn in the summer)—and besides that there was sour-cream cabbage slaw, and sliced tomatoes in vinegar and sugar, and fresh-baked rolls, and—set out in these special little scallop-edged serving dishes—home-canned apple butter and molasses. It was great. Everything about that place made you feel terrific, it really did.

What happened was that after lunch that day Mrs. Spicer took Jacky along to help her pick some peaches, and, well,

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Major Spicer and me didn't even hear them when they got back. There were always people going in and out anyway, and we were upstairs way over on the other side of the house in the Major's personal study. I liked Major Spicer, and it's true he reminded me a little bit of Daddy. But I don't think I could ever really confuse the two of them, at least not the way the Major mixed me up with the girl in the picture. He was showing me through this big album of photographs at the time. Lots of old black-and-white pictures, starting with ones of his family and then going on to what he called his overseas tours in the military—this one I particularly remember of him standing in a flat bright place with his hands behind his back and wearing one of those helmets like Ramar of the Jungle. That was in North Africa during the war, he told me. The album was a kind of personal scrapbook. There was a dim, brownish one near the beginning of his mother and father—her standing in an ankle-length dress near the spout of an old hand pump, an arm held up to shade her eyes as if what she was looking at was too bright for her to look at straight-on—him standing beside the pump handle in a three-piece suit, one foot forward and a hand stuck into the armhole of his vest like he's about to make a speech on the Fourth of July. There was page after page of newspaper clippings about Major Spicer from the sports pages and large group-portrait shots where he was a member of some team or other. In a specially clear one he was sitting at the center of the first row of his hometown baseball team holding a bat. Everyone had on a striped shirt and knee-socks and they were all arranged on the seats of a wooden bleacher. To the sides and behind them you could see the trunks of trees, the tiny little crooked lines in the bark focused so sharp the trees took your attention almost as much as the faces. When Jacky walked in, we'd been looking at a photograph of a girl sitting in a tree swing. She had on a long white dress and was sitting sort of sideways, leaning against the rope so one knee rose up against her skirt. Her arms were stretched kind of lazy-like across her lap, a branch of wildflowers in one hand, maybe blue chicory or ironweed or some kind of aster, the stalk dangling so a blossom almost touched the ground. Her hair caught the light and was held back from her face by a wide, dark ribbon. This was someone I reminded him of, that's

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what he was telling me, someone he knew when he was still in school, before he joined the Army, way back before the war. And she really did look like me, she could have been my old-fashioned double. Her name was Audrey Cavanagh, his first love, so ethereal, he said, like a little faun, and she was built like you, he said, a fine round bottom for such a narrow girl, and his hand moves from my waist where he's been occasionally touching me to help direct my attention to some particular photograph, him seated in the swivel chair, me standing there beside the desk, and he slides his hand down over my rear end just like that, like he's sculpting clay. And I still don't move, not even when after a while his hand strokes up the inside of my leg and I feel his finger and thumb slip up inside my shorts—I was wearing those loose khaki ones with the wide cuffs and the big pockets. I put one hand on his shoulder like I was trying to keep my balance, that's all I did. He was touching me so lightly I almost had to push against him to be sure he was there. Him talking all the time, and me still listening—as if the other thing with his hand is happening to somebody else. One minute he's talking to the girl in the photograph, saying things like, "Ah, Audrey, you're still as lovely as an angel, perched there in your swing," and the next minute it's as if he's talking to me, calling me by her name and at the same time feeling me up like it's open season on ducks or something. The way the desk was facing out a window meant we had our backs to the door, which also must have been unlatched, because neither one of us even heard it when Jacky came in. There's no telling how long he'd been standing there watching us, but long enough I guess. I bet we made a pretty picture from over by the doorway. It wasn't until the Major turned so he could nuzzle up against my chest that we saw Jack. He's just standing there popeyed in the doorway, like he's suddenly remembered something important he forgot to do. You almost expected him to snap his fingers. We were all frozen that way for a second, caught in this burst of something, not light but almost as bright and quick as when a flashbulb goes off. And then everything picks up again all of a sudden right where it left off, and there's voices and sounds again and everybody's moving in different directions. Me, I've got myself backed up against this big globe of the world on a wooden stand right there beside the

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desk. The globe was so big it came up to my waist, and I had my hands behind me holding onto it. I'm spinning it slowly, feeling the relief map of the mountain ranges slide by beneath my fingers, and I'm thinking, almost like a joke: even if part of me *is* in the United States of America, the other part of me is probably over in China somewhere, all the way on the other side of the world.

What happened next was, one of the married daughters—everybody called her Sissy—I think her married name was Northman or Newman or something like that, she was little Wendell's mother, but she'd left her husband just a couple weeks before, it was a family scandal at the moment—anyway, Sissy comes waltzing in right behind Jacky and she must have bumped up against him or something because both of them jumped like they'd been hit by electricity. When Jacky jumped, it startled me so I pushed the globe right out of its socket and it bounces once and then rolls over across the floor toward where the Major'd come to a halt after he'd left his chair. All of us are looking at this big colored globe of the world, blue and green and brown and yellow, and the Major bends down and lifts it up off the floor with both hands to see if any damage has been done. "Is it okay?" I ask. I feel like I have to say *something*, so I say, "I didn't know it could slip out like that." "Just a slight dent, hardly noticeable," says the Major. "Right smack in the middle of Greenland. Nothing there anyway." Jacky looks up at him and smiles, just as cool, as if butter wouldn't melt in his mouth. "You can probably get it to pop out again if you just apply a little heat," he says. "Like holding a match to a ping-pong ball." Sissy laughs and says in a little-girl voice, "Will Daddy kiss the world and make it all better?" And the rest of us laughed too. Ha, ha, ha. Everything seemed like it was just hanging there again for a second, and then Sissy says, "It's so hot, I sent Buddy up to bring down one of your picture puzzles, preferably a snowy Currier and Ives. We're going to take it out on the east porch and try to cool off a little. Then I remembered Mama put all those old puzzles up in the attic. Sorry to barge in and startle everybody. My, it's warm in here, isn't it? Daddy, you ought to turn on the window fan if you're going to spend any time up here. Peggy Sue?" she says to me, "you look like you could

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use something with ice in it." So Jacky went first and then Sissy followed me and him out the door, and we left the Major still standing there holding his globe in his arms. The way he was holding it made the world look like a big Buddha's belly. The little dent where Greenland was could've been its navel.

So Jacky and me never really had a chance to talk right then. Sissy sent him up to the attic for a jigsaw puzzle and then she says to me, "How would you like some good old country lemonade?" and grabs my hand, and the next thing I know the three of us are out on the porch on the shady side of the house sipping ice-cold lemonade through straws. There's a big cut-glass pitcher all fogged-up and sweaty sitting beside us, and we're scattering out the cardboard pieces of the puzzle on a folding table, each piece glazed and colored on one side and dull pink on the other. We're trying to separate all the edge pieces first, looking for straight lines against all the knobs and sockets of the regular pieces. Because of how we're sitting, I'm working on a side edge, Sissy's working on the snow-covered bottom part, and Jacky's got all the blue pieces of sky. The picture's called "An American Homestead Winter," and there's lots of white, but there's other colors too: a few reds and lots of greens and browns and yellows, and about a million different tones of grayish-blue shadow. The picture on the cover of the box shows these sort of waxy-looking people going about their chores, gathering wood, carrying a bucket, feeding cows and ducks in the snow. A brown dog that looks a lot like old Bertha, but younger, is prancing along beside the man carrying the kindling, and to his right there's a red, horse-drawn sleigh with a man in a blue coat holding the reins, and next to him a lady, probably his wife, with some kind of a pink bonnet tied under her chin. They're passing a farmhouse set on a low hill by the road. It reminded me of the Spicers' house a little bit. I was thinking it looked like their house might look after a snowfall. I'm concentrating as hard as I can on the puzzle so I won't have to think about the other stuff. I'm looking for pieces of twisty brown forest with a straight edge on one side. I don't even glance over at Jacky because I'm not ready to meet his eyes yet, I'm not sure how he expects me to act. But what the

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heck, nothing much really happened. And why should *I* be embarrassed? I didn't do anything. That's what I think, but there's no telling what Jacky thinks, which is what always throws me off. But we're all working on the puzzle so we don't really get a chance to look at each other much anyway. Instead, we're looking back and forth from the picture on the box to the skinny sections of connected puzzle pieces in front of us. It's like we're working on three different puzzles instead of one big one. OVER FIVE HUNDRED PIECES, it says on the box, SCROLL-CUT AND INTERLOCKING. "So I see Daddy's been showing you his trophies," Sissy says to me. "That's a sure sign of favor—if you can sit through it. There!" she says, pushing a piece of shadowy snow into one of her little sections. "A corner! Now we're starting to get somewhere. All we need is the corner on your side, Peggy Sue, and we'll have almost half the frame! Buddy, I hate to say anything, but your sky appears to be upside-down." "Hah!" Jacky snorts. "From where I'm sitting it's everything else that's upside-down." Sissy laughs like she's been taken by surprise. "You're absolutely right," she says. "Everything *is* relative." She's got on glasses with turquoise frames, and she points a finger between her eyebrows to push them back up her nose. Her hair's so brown it's almost black and it's cut short and curly. She reminds me a little of Audrey Hepburn—real thin-boned and aristocratic looking. She must be distracted about something though because she lights a new cigarette before the last one's finished burning. When she exhales, her nostrils flare out, and then she reaches up and picks a fleck of tobacco off her tongue. "Well, it's almost Wedding Day Eve! You love birds must feel like you've got the world on a string, sittin' on a rainbow—isn't that the way the song goes?" She moves a piece of puzzle around and when she can't find a fit tosses it back onto her little pile. "I bet you can't wait to get into Maryland and tie the knot that binds, right? Make it official in the eyes of God, man and the PTA." Jacky just laughs and says, "It'll probably take a couple of days once we get to Maryland to get a license and everything." "Well," she says, "I wish you all the luck. At your stage, it's all bill-and-coo and rub-a-dub-dub. Believe me I know all about it, and I say enjoy it while it lasts. Seize the day. Just don't take all that hot britches stuff too seriously.

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I'm not saying this to shock you, but—look, take my advice and go to a good drugstore instead of a justice-of-the-peace. Go ahead and have all the fun you want—just don't get married unless you absolutely have to." She's found a piece that fits and she taps it in with a clear-polished fingernail. Her nails aren't long but they're so perfect they make me curl my fingers. My own nails are pretty raggedy-looking, even though I've been trying only to chew them when they need trimming. Her fingers have yellow tobacco stains though. She'll forget she's holding a cigarette and it'll burn right down to the skin. "What makes you think we've got such 'hot britches'?" Jacky asks. He's got his elbow on his knee and his chin in his hand and he's looking up at Sissy like she's the light at the end of the tunnel. "I mean, why do you think that?" Over across the yard we can hear some kids playing guns in the woods. "Pa'*dow*! Pa'*dow*!" one of them yells. "I *got*-cha!" "You did *not*!" "I did *so*!" Sissy gives her surprised laugh and raises her glasses to the top of her head so she can look at Jacky eye-to-eye. "Because, as my mother always says—and what higher authority can there be?—'when peaches get ripe they fall off the tree.' " She raises her eyebrows and nods her head in a quick gesture she uses a lot—it's like her mother's "Amen." "I'm not saying you're wrong," Jacky smiles. "In fact, I'd have to say you're probably right, but is that just a generalization or are you talking about me and Peggy Sue in particular?" "Well, if the shoe fits . . . ," Sissy smiles back, ". . . it might as well be yours—no?" She lowers her glasses again and looks down at the puzzle. "Peggy Sue, what do you think?" she asks. "Does the shoe fit?" "I guess it both does and doesn't," I say. I'm a regular little diplomat. "I'm not exactly sure what shoe you're talking about," I say, "but it probably doesn't fit as good as this," and I push another piece into a string of about ten or twelve that was my main section of edge, twice as long as any of theirs. Sissy falls back into her rocking chair and takes a drag on her cigarette. "Don't be too sure," she says. She rests her elbow on the arm of her chair and touches the tip of her cigarette to the tip of her thumb, and as she breathes out smoke she just openly sizes Jacky up—the way somebody might look at something they wanted to draw. "I just meant that you're, you know, young and healthy and in love, and there's bound to be a certain, let's

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say . . . physical attraction, *n'est ce pas*?" Jacky doesn't say anything for a second. They're both just staring at each other. I mean I almost felt like a third wheel. "Is that how it was with you and your husband?" Jacky finally says. "But of course!" laughs Sissy. "That part was sheer bliss. At least it was at first. But as it turned out, we really didn't have much else in common. When the other wore out, there wasn't a hell of a whole lot left." "The other?" Jacky asks. I can sense Sissy smiling at him more than I can actually see her. "Hot britches," she says: "Rub-a-dub-dub." And she wags her cigarette back and forth with her thumb. "Uh-huh, uh-huh," Jacky says, nodding his head. I'm still working quietly away on my pile of edges when Sissy suddenly sits up straight and reaches for her lemonade. She rattles the ice, then purses her lips to the straw and sips the lemonade down until it sputters in the ice cubes like a little motor. She's got her eyes back on the puzzle now, and she says, "Look at Peggy Sue! She's found the other corner!" Then, after studying her own sections of white bottom pieces for a minute, she taps a piece with the pink nail of her middle finger and says, "If this fits that, I think we can join sides." She places it real gently and pushes it in. "Yes! Prefect fit! How's that? Now we've got the bottom and one side—all we need is Buddy's blue sky and we're half way home!"

I don't know where the Major was. Maybe he was still in his study, staring at Greenland. The three of us sat there working on the puzzle all afternoon and at one time or another almost everybody else in the family stopped by to put in a couple of pieces, but we never saw hide nor hair of the Major. We worked on the puzzle until it was almost supper time. There were lightning bugs under the trees across the lawn by then, and it was getting hard to see. We could have turned on a lamp I guess, but nobody thought to. All we had left to fill in was some of the snow and a section of the sky. Except for that, the picture was almost done. It could have been either a sundown or a daybreak scene because there was a lot of pink in the sky, along with the blue. I tried to figure out which it was, morning or evening, but you couldn't really tell. It probably didn't matter. When I asked Sissy what she thought, she said, "Who knows? Maybe it's one of those long winter twi-

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lights that last all day. You know the kind I mean? Mmmmm . . . days like that always make me feel so romantic." She arches her back like one of the cats stretching and then suddenly widens her eyes and laughs. "Don't misunderstand," she says. "I only mean days like that make me want to curl up on a davenport somewhere next to a crackling fire with a pot of steaming tea and a good, long novel—something Victorian maybe—although, come to think of it, there's not a wisp of smoke coming from any of these chimneys . . . I wonder why." "Where there's no smoke, there's no fire," Jacky says, whatever that's supposed to mean, and we're all three sitting there in the dark giggling like idiots when Mrs. Spicer calls through the window screen: "Supper's near about ready, Sissy, if you fellows want to wash your hands." "Thanks, Mama," Sissy says, and then she looks across the table at Jacky and me, raises her glasses to the top of her head, and grins. "Oh, *screw*," she says in a way that sounds really sexy. "It looks like we won't get to finish what we started. And we came so close too." Nobody says anything for a second. Jacky leans back from the table, and right at that instant the crickets started up, like a ringing in your ears. It was a real warm evening. The stars were coming out and the sky was a thick, deep purple. There wasn't a breeze to be had, and the skin under my leg kept sticking to the cane seat of my chair. Through the window we can hear people moving around inside, chairs scraping against the floor, a drawer opening and then the sound of silverware. "Mom?" somebody's calling. "Where *are* you? Ma-a-*um*!" Sissy sighs and says, "Well, it was nice while it lasted, wasn't it?" Then she calls inside, "Here, lover, mother's out here, just a sec." She turns back to us and says, "He probably fell in the creek. He's always getting his feet wet. From wet diapers to wet sneakers," and she laughs. "You'll find out, Peggy Sue. You'll be me before you know it." Right then, click, a lamp goes on inside the window and some of the light spills out onto the card table. Except for where the table shows black through the unfilled holes, the light makes the glazed surface of the picture puzzle shine so that the snow looks almost real.

When we went in to supper, there was the Major sitting at the head of the table just as if nothing had ever happened at all.

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He's smiling that same crinkly smile and sniffing at the ham roast like he's posing for the cover of the *Saturday Evening Post*. Real wholesome and homey. When he said grace, he ended the prayer with: "And thank You too, Lord, for the sweet gift of love that is so deeply impressed, by Thy will, in the bosom of each and every one of Thy children . . . In Christ's name, Amen." I mean you had to hand it to the guy. And Jacky and me are playing right along—except Jacky's voice gets this little edge sometimes. He'll say stuff that means one thing to him and me and Sissy, another thing to him and me and the Major, and something else entirely to everybody else. Like when we had fresh sliced peaches with sugar and cream for dessert, and Jacky says, "Peaches may fall off the tree when they're ripe enough, but we picked these, didn't we, Mrs. Spicer? Sissy, how do yours taste? How about yours, Major? Ripe enough?" I think Jacky might have made him nervous, because right after supper the Major offered to take everybody into town to see *Ben-Hur*, which they'd all been dying to see for weeks, I guess. Me and Jacky'd already seen it twice, so when it looks like Sissy's going to have to stay home with little Wendell, Jacky volunteers us to babysit. "We'd just like to repay some of the hospitality we've been shown," he says. "Goodness, what a young gentleman!" says Mrs. Spicer. So Sissy got to go to the movies with the rest, and we ended up having to put Wendell and his little friend William to bed. William had gotten permission to stay over and keep Wendell company. Anyway, it wasn't until they finally fell asleep after a last drink of water and a Peter Pan storybook and a pillow fight that Jacky and me had a chance to be alone. And I could see right away he didn't want to talk about me and the Major at all. Instead, he looks up and says, "Want to see something neat?" We're sitting at the kitchen table eating a second helping of peaches and cream, which we'd brought out of the refrigerator as soon as we knew the coast was clear. "Sure . . . like what?" I say. "Like follow me, I'll show you," Jacky says. We drop our plates into the soapy water in the sink, and Jacky grabs a long red flashlight from a shelf near the back door. I figure we're going outside and I start to turn the knob, but Jacky shakes his head and says, "This way, Little Sister, this way." I didn't like him calling me that, but I followed him anyway. We went out the kitchen to the hallway

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and then up the front stairs to the second floor. We're tiptoeing past the door to the sleeping porch where the kids are and Jacky's got the flashlight in one hand and he puts a finger to his lips with the other, and I suddenly felt like we were robbers. I got a sort of butterflies feeling like I had to go to the bathroom. We're passing another door when Jacky stops, turns, and pushes it open. It's a lady's bedroom, you could tell just by the way it smelled. "I think Sissy sleeps in here. Want to look around?" he says. "Is this what you wanted to show me?" I asked. "What's so neat about this?" "Shhh!" he whispers. "Keep your pants on." Then instead of turning on a lamp, he switches on the flashlight and shines it around the room. The beam of light was almost like something solid, like a stick that Jacky could poke around with. He pokes it over some stuff on the night table—a crocheted doily, an empty glass, a Kleenex box with a white tissue puffed out part way through the opening—pokes it on over to the bunched-up pillows against the headboard, then on down the bed itself—which has a purple patchwork comforter that looks like somebody's been laying on it—on down across the floor to a little pile of clothes near the dresser. On top are the navy blue shorts Sissy was wearing earlier—inside-out now with the pocket linings showing—and a pair of pearl-colored panties. "What are we doing?" I asked. "Just looking," Jacky says. "Well, I'm getting out of here," I told him. Sissy'd been nice to us and I didn't like nosing around in her room that way. So I turned around and walked out, and after another second here comes Jacky too. "Okay, let's go," he says, switching off the flashlight and pulling the door closed to where it was.

I have no idea what's on his mind at this point. I'm just hoping he doesn't want to steal anything. Our money was getting low and I was wondering how we planned to get some more—which I still am wondering in fact. But Jacky walks on down the hall and doesn't stop at any more bedrooms. Instead he takes me around a turn at the end of the hallway and we immediately come to a dead end at this closed door. The turn in the hall is really just a little nook with the door tucked in it. Jacky turns the knob and sweeps out his arm in this sort of cramped imitation of Reginald Van Gleason the Third ushering me into some fabulous mansion. All I can see

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is a staircase going up. It's like a tunnel, no wider than the door, and it's real steep. The stairs are made out of unfinished boards, so rough they look almost fuzzy, and they march up one after another into the dark. When Jacky points the flashlight, I can see ceiling rafters through the opening at the top of the stairway but that's all. While I'm poking my head through the door, Jacky leans over and—real quiet but right in my eardrum—says, "The *Sha*dow kno-o-ows," and then he does this spooky laugh. Eeyow, it gave me the creeps, and I didn't want to go nosing around in anybody's attic with a flashlight anyway—there'd probably be spiderwebs all over the place up there and who knew what all else, maybe even bats for all I knew. Even down there in the doorway I could smell the dust, and something else too, like the insides of certain old books, or like the woods. It was a smell that had layers to it, the way it might be if the smells of a whole lot of different rooms were piled all into one another. "Come on, Jill," Jacky says. He puts his hand on my arm and points the flashlight: "Look!" he says. "There's the signpost up ahead! Your next stop—'The Twilight Zone'!" He's got Rod Serling's voice down pat, and I'm laughing now, ready to go up and take a look. The spookiness isn't real anymore, it's like being inside a funhouse now, and while we're climbing the stairs Jacky's doing his Mr. Magoo voice, saying stuff like, "Eh-eh-eh . . . yes by Gad, the old homestead . . . I'd recognize it anywhere . . . chuckle-chuckle-chuckle," and I'm just laughing away, not even thinking about the stuff with the Major or anything else now. When we come up the stairs through the opening at the top, our eyes are at floor level, and from this angle especially the attic is pitch black. We can only see where the flashlight makes a hole in the dark. There's a lot we can't see. Things just pop into sight wherever Jack happens to shine the flashlight. It's like he's showing his own movie with that light and also following along wherever it takes us. He's shining it around like he can lick up everything he sees with it or like he's pouring all this stuff out of the flashlight itself instead of finding what's already there. From what I could tell, it was just an ordinary attic, but bigger and more crowded with junk—old bicycle wheels hanging from the rafters and all different kinds of chairs, stacks of *Life* magazines and *National Geographics*, wooden chests and mirrors and a huge

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bamboo birdcage in a metal hoop at the top of its own floor stand. "Can you believe this place?" Jacky says. "Isn't this incredible? When I was up here this afternoon I couldn't believe it. They must've been storing stuff up here since before the Flood!" He's really revved-up about it, and I can see what he means. I've never been in anyplace quite like it in my life, not really. It seemed like an ordinary attic at first just because it looked exactly the way I'd always pictured an attic *would* look, without ever really thinking about it or anything. Jacky moves his searchlight in a circle around the room and we can see the junk piled everywhere, with little aisles winding through it all, like paths in the woods, leading off to other sections of the attic we can't even begin to see from here. Piles of books and boxes, green steamer trunks with white stenciling and half a dozen tennis rackets, a pair of black rubber hip-boots and a straw fishing creel hung up by a leather strap next to an old-fashioned baby buggy with a sun canopy and big, spoked wheels. Stuff even crowding into where the eaves of the roof come down close to the floor and make low little passageways and crawlspaces around the edges of the room. I bet we weren't up there more than a minute when we heard a sort of low stomach rumble of thunder. For a split second, the little half-moon windows in the gables of the attic all lit up like jack-o'-lanterns and almost at the same instant there's a giant crash of thunder that makes the whole attic sort of shake and creak and jingle. "Too much!" Jacky says. "What a great place for a ghost story!" He's whispering and probably doesn't even realize it. The windows light up again right then and there's another clap of thunder and then suddenly it's raining, the sound of it loud and steady, drumming on the roof right over our heads. We can hear it whishing against the sides of the house and gurgling down the drainpipes—a lot of little sounds that melt into one big one. Funny thing is, instead of making it spookier, the rain makes the attic seem all protected and snug, like someplace where it's always King's-X and bad things can't happen. "What if everything you ever had all ended up in one place?" Jacky says. "Like you could find anything you'd ever lost up here no matter where you lost it." "Yeah," I said, "that'd be neat.

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What'd you look for first?" "No, you don't get it," he says, "I mean you'd never even *need* to look for anything because it'd all be there already, like your whole life, all in one place, not spread out everywhere. That would be you—everything that was part of you all together." Jacky can go on like that all night, talking about some dumb theory or other, like the one about the galaxies expanding. Sometimes you think he's got to be kidding and it turns out he's dead serious. So Jacky's talking away and we're moving into some deeper part of the attic, almost like another room that the main one opens up into, when suddenly I see somebody standing there against the wall. It was like having the breath knocked out of you. I couldn't even scream, I just grabbed Jacky's arm and pointed, and when he shined the light over we saw it was only one of those sewing dummies in the shape of a woman. Whoever it was had a good figure too, maybe as nice as yours, Mom—and it was sort of like seeing them naked. That might sound weird but it's true. It could've been Mrs. Spicer before she got fat. Looking at it gave me almost the same feeling of spying I had in Sissy's bedroom. Jacky couldn't take his eyes off it. "Well, what have we here?" he says. He goes over and sets the flashlight down on top of a shelf so he's got his hands free. Then he comes up to the dummy and cups his palms over the dummy's breasts. "Oh, baby," he moans. He puts his hands around its rear end and pulls the dummy up against him and starts, like, making out with it. When he moves his hands up to his own shoulders, it really looks from the back like somebody's got their arms around him. Then he says to me, "What if this was Sissy? Oh, man! Wouldn't that be something? What I wouldn't do . . . just like you and the Major." Finally, I thought, here it comes. I was beginning to wonder if he'd actually seen anything or not. "Why'd you let him do it?" Jacky says over his shoulder. "Did you like it?" I didn't know what to answer, so for a second I just listened to the rain. If this was winter instead of summer, I was thinking, all that water would be snow and in the morning everything'd look shiny and white, just like in the picture on the jigsaw puzzle. Jacky turns away from the dummy and I'm thinking he's going to ask me again and I won't be able to avoid it

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forever, but instead he says, "What if I did that to Sissy? Do you think she'd like it?" I'm standing next to something soft, and when Jacky shines the light over at me I see it's an old day bed with piles of woolen coats and old uniforms and stuff on it. "I guess so," I tell him. "I think she might have a crush on you." I figure if I can keep on his good side about Sissy he won't want to talk about me. "Yeah?" he says. "Would you let me if you were Sissy?" "Sure," I said. "What would it be like?" he says—then, "Let's pretend you're Sissy and I'm me, like when you taught me how to slow-dance. Show me," he says. And he puts the flashlight down on some kind of old hope chest so the light makes our shadows real long—they go all the way across the floor and halfway up the opposite wall, like giants. Jacky comes up until he's standing right next to me and he reaches up and touches his fingers to my breast, real soft. I wasn't really, you know, excited or anything like that, but my breast started to get all tingly, and I guess he could feel the tip of it perk up, because he looks at me funny and says "That's it, isn't it? . . . does that feel good?" I sort of gulped and nodded and he kept on doing it and then in a few minutes he started kissing me and putting his tongue in my mouth, and I swear that's about the time I knew I was lost. But then he stops all of a sudden and reaches in his pocket. I thought he was only trying to straighten himself out down there—I mean I could feel how stretched he was and how tight his jeans must be, but instead he pulls something out of his pocket and holds it over to the light. It's the pair of panties we saw in Sissy's bedroom. I couldn't believe it. "Would you put these on?" he says. "Oh, man, that'd really be something." I was getting excited too by then, and I bet I never really do put this part in my letter, but I loved the way it felt to get *Jacky* so excited. I mean when he saw me in those panties he starts moaning and groaning and then he's got his hands all over me and he pushes me down onto the pile of coats. I could feel a button on one of the uniforms poking up against my back. By now Jacky's pants are down and he's got my legs apart, and then, just like that, we're actually doing it. It hurt like anything at first, but pretty soon I got sort of numb and it was okay. The whole time, I could smell wool

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and I could hear these springs somewhere under us squeaking like little birds in a shrub tree. Compared to that, the sound of the rain seemed to come from real far off. It all happened so fast, but it seemed to take a long time too. I was thinking how much I loved Jacky and how good it felt to have him so close inside me, wanting me so much, when I hear him whispering in my ear, "Sissy," he's saying, "Oh, God, Sissy, you just love it . . . you just love it . . ." *Sissy, Sissy,* he kept calling me, over and over again—until after a while I started to cry, I couldn't help it, and pretty soon the tears were coming like they might never stop.

The next morning we hugged everybody goodbye—everybody except the Major, that is, who never touched me again, not once after that one time—and we promised to write, and then Major Spicer and this old Army buddy of his drove us to Hagerstown and left us off at a Howard Johnson's Motel. That was a couple of days ago and now we're in this falling-down old mansion I told you about—in Delaware or Maryland or maybe even Virginia. It's hard to tell exactly what state you're in around here, but we're right next to the ocean. The sound of the surf comes and goes just like somebody breathing. So now I keep thinking, maybe I really *am* pregnant. Can that happen between brothers and sisters, between twins? Or if it can, do you have to do it more than once? Because we only did it that one time, and since then we never even mention it and Jacky's gotten so he's real self-conscious about any kind of touching at all. It seems like we might as well be strangers—that's the worst part about the whole thing. I guess if I don't get my period that'll mean I'm probably pregnant. We'll just have to wait and see, right? If I *am* pregnant though, then maybe we can finally stop this wild-goose chase after Daddy and turn around. Sometimes I almost wish I *was* pregnant, because I'd really love to come home. Where we are now, there's always this fishy salt smell in the air. It'll go away but then it'll come back and you'll notice it again. Sometimes it smells great and other times it smells just like garbage. The ocean makes a steady whishing sound like rain against the rocks on the other side of the stone wall across the

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road. Jacky's out there somewhere trying to catch a bluefish. There's a lot of tall grass around here that looks like wheat. The feathery tips are a silver color, and I spend a lot of time just sitting here watching the way the wind ripples through them like they were made out of water.

Commonplace Book

BY E. M. Forster

Edited by Philip Gardner. Previously available only in a facsimile edition of 350 copies, Forster's *Commonplace Book* is not simply a collection of quotations, but a deeply personal record of his life, his culture, and his friends between 1925 and 1968. Priceless to the Forster scholar and fascinating to the general reader, it is filled with self-examination, critical opinions of literature and society, political views, character sketches, epigrams, jokes, and prose poems. It tells us much about Forster after he had stopped being a producing novelist, and reveals throughout the intelligence, tough-mindedness, and warmth of a great writer. The Stanford edition has been set in type to reflect the appearance of Forster's original handwritten text. Illustrated. $35.00

Stanford University Press

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DANA GIOIA

In Cheever Country

Half an hour north of Grand Central
the country opens up. Through the rattling
grime-streaked windows of the coach, streams appear,
pine trees gather into woods, and the leaf-swept yards
grow large enough to seem picturesque.

Farther off smooth parkways curve along the rivers,
trimmed by well-kept trees, and the County Airport
now boasts seven lines, but to know this country
see it from a train—even this crowded local
jogging home half an hour before dark

smelling of smoke and rain-damp shoes
on an afternoon of dodging sun and showers.
One trip without a book or paper
will show enough to understand
this landscape no one takes too seriously.

The architecture of each station still preserves
its fantasy beside the sordid tracks—
defiant pergolas, a shuttered summer lodge,
a shadowy pavilion framed by high-arched windows
in this land of northern sun and lingering winter.

The town names stencilled on the platform signs—
Clear Haven, Bullet Park, and Shady Hill—
show that developers at least believe in poetry
if only as a talisman against the commonplace.
There always seems so much to guard against.

The sunset broadens for a moment, and the passengers
standing on the platform turn strangely luminous

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in the light streaming from the palisades across the river.
Some board the train. Others greet their arrivals
shaking hands and embracing in the dusk.

If there is an afterlife, let it be a small town
gentle as this spot at just this instant.
But the car doors close, and the bright crowd,
unaware of its election, disperses to the small
pleasures of the evening. The platform falls behind.

The train gathers speed. Stations are further apart.
Marble staircases climb the hills where derelict estates
glimmer in the river-brightened dusk.
Some are convents now, some orphanages,
these palaces the Robber Barons gave to God.

And some are merely left to rot where now
broken stone lions guard a roofless colonnade,
a half-collapsed gazebo bursts with tires,
and each detail warns it is not so difficult
to make a fortune as to pass it on.

But splendor in ruins is splendor still,
even glimpsed from a passing train,
and it is wonderful to imagine standing
in the balustraded gardens above the river
where barges still ply their distant commerce.

Somewhere upstate huge factories melt ore,
mills weave fabric on enormous looms,
and sweeping combines glean the cash-green fields.
Fortunes are made. Careers advance like armies.
But here so little happens that is obvious.

Here in the odd light of a rainy afternoon
a ledger is balanced and put away,
a houseguest knots his tie beside a bed,
and a hermit thrush sings in the unsold lot
next to the tracks the train comes hurtling down.

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Finally it's dark outside. Through the freight houses
and oil tanks the train begins to slow
approaching the station where rows of travel posters
and empty benches wait along the platform.
Outside a few cars idle in the sudden shower.

And this at last is home, this ordinary town
where the lights on the hill gleaming in the rain
are the lights that children bathe by, and it is time
to go home now—to drinks, to love, to supper,
to the modest places which contain our lives.

A Short History of Tobacco

Profitable, poisonous, and purely American—
it was Columbus who discovered it
on reaching China, noticing the leaves
in a canoe. He sent his men ashore
to find the Great Khan's palace. They returned
to tell of squatting natives who drank smoke.

Rolfe smuggled seeds to cold, bankrupt Virginia.
When he returned years later, all the streets
were planted with the crop, the marketplace
and churchyards overgrown. Grim ministers
preached harvest from the pulpit and stood out
among the fields at night to guard their tithes.

More valuable than silver, worth ten times
the price of peppercorn. In Africa
six rolls could buy a man. The ships would reach
Virginia stocked with slaves or English wives
while every year the farms moved farther west
abandoning their dry, exhausted fields.

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Tenacious, fertile, rank as any weed,
Linnaeus counted forty thousand seeds
inside one pod. *Miraculus*, he wrote,
the cure for toothache, shingles, running sores
or pushed by bellows through a patient's lung
the panacea of the alchemists.

Fragrant, prophylactic, and medicinal,
Pepys chewed it during the Great Plague.
It cost a fortune, but it saved his life.
Later he spent an afternoon to watch
a surgeon kill a cat with just one drop
of the quintessence of Virginia leaf.

. . . But when a bear was killed, tobacco smoke
was blown into his throat to soothe the spirit.
The elders smoked and chanted in a trance.
The Mayans blew the smoke to the four corners
of the world. It was a gift from God,
profitable, poisonous, and purely American.

Los Angeles after the Rain

Back home again on one of those bright mornings
when the city wakes to find itself anew.
The smog gone, the thundering storm
blown out to sea, birds
frantic in their joyous cacophony, and the mountains,
so long invisible in haze,
newly risen with the sun.

It is a morning snatched from Paradise,
a vision of the desert brought to flower—
of Eve standing in her nakedness,

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immortal Adam drunk with all
the gaudy colors of the world,
and each taste and touch, each
astounding pleasure still waiting to be named.

The city stirs and stretches
like a young man waking after love.
Sunlight stroking the skin and the
promiscuous wind whispering
"Seize the moment. Surrender to the air's
irrefutable embrace. Trust me that today
even seduction may lead to love."

Too many voices overhead. Too many scents
commingle in the stark perfume
of green winter freshened by the rain.
This is no morning for decisions.
A day to ditch responsibility, look up
old friends and dream
of quiet love, impossible resolutions.

Maze Without a Minotaur

If we could only push these walls
apart, unfold the room the way
a child might take apart a box
and lay it flat upon the floor—
so many corners cleared at last!
Or else could rip away the roof
and stare down at the dirty rooms,
the hallways turning on themselves,
and understand at last their plan—
dark maze without a minotaur,
no monsters but ourselves.

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Yet who
could bear to see it all? The slow
descending spirals of the dust
against the spotted windowpane,
the sunlight on the yellow lace,
the hoarded wine turned dark and sour,
the photographs, the letters—all
the crowded closets of the heart.

One wants to turn away—and cry
for fire to break out on the stairs
and raze each suffocating room.
But the walls stay, the roof remains
strong and immovable, and we
can only pray that if these rooms
have memories, they are not ours.

The End of a Season

I wanted to tell you how I walked tonight
down the hillside to the lake
after the storm had blown away
and say how everything suddenly seemed so clear
against the sparkling, rain-soaked streets
cold and bright as starlight.

I wanted to wake you up, despite the hour
and drag you out into the dark
crisp air to feel the end of winter,
the cold we cursed so long
slipping away—and suddenly so precious
now that it was leaving.

But there is no one to come back to now,
only the night, its wind and rain, the chill
magnificence of its borrowed light,
the touch of this impossible season.

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HERBERT LOMAS

From *Letters in the Dark*

I lay awake writing letters to you
In the dark—so I got up, felt alone,
And put on the light. I need someone.
There's a kind of intimacy that's closer than the bone
And can sometimes get into letters, more than anywhere.
It's communion with the dead, or more like prayer.
The dead are somehow refined, or are being refined.
When they answer back it's in disembodied voices
From which all static and chatter stored in the cells
Have been magnetized off, buried, or even burned.
In the purgatory of the small hours the person
God might have first imagined stirs on the rock,
Pushes the vulture from his liver and begins to turn
His anguish into intimate words, or at least
Disembodied expressions of love disguised
As chatter and sent to a disembodied love.

*

By the standards of Parliament
Jesus was very naive.
It's not that we're not all agreed.
We know what's rational,
It's that rationality's not compatible
With powerful interests and greed.

The world's very old,
Much older than the Messiah,
And more modern.
The way things tread and science
Between them
Have trodden and trodden and trodden.

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He didn't know
How the world wagged,
The politics of size.
To realize his ambitions
Or even survive
He needed to compromise.

If he succeeded
In ruling the world
It'd have to be thanks
To the Roman Empire
The Sanhedrin
Or nowadays the banks.

Unfortunately for him
He'd thought all this out
And got it wrong
In hallucinatory argument
With the devil
Who loves the strong.

*

This fly was born in this attic
With no food. What can he do but fuss,
Plod up a pane of glass, fall,
Buzz, plod up again like Sisyphus.
He was here yesterday, and the day before,
Now he's got to the mullion, crawls
Along it, round the corner, excelsior—
On a higher pane above. Outside, climatic—
All that the glass is blocking him from meeting.
I open the window. Retreating
Upwards from the space above the sill,
He needs some coaxing with a pencil,
Then side-slips into coldness that will kill.

*

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Midnight Mass: Mervyn tells us
Divinity desires a world like this burning tree.
The choir carols from every coign in turn
Of the semi-darkened sanctuary,
Tuning the stones
And topping them up with that plangent wine
The ghost mouth tastes in every graceful shrine.

I read the prayers from the lectern
And from all those bowed heads
An almost tangible breath has begun to flow:
My heart turns red
In the expanding now
And vertical as a chimney
I feel their flames go through me to the tower.

*

Now here's a cosy photo:
Two seekers who look quite fun—
Both of them holding roses
And with curious costume on.
One is a mystical lama,
The other a lunatic don.
Both are bedragoned with visions
From *The Tibetan Book of the Dead*,
Though the whole thing is loaded with dread
And could have been once all a con.
But something's gone right with the lama,
And something's gone wrong with the don.

*

On the cover of *Honest to God* there was a depressed
Thinker. Perhaps all thinking is depressed.
It's depression that makes us think. Is it because
Our faith's too cheerful that we miss sometimes the wit

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Only those who know the truth's always
Absconding can hit? The Bishop's face
Is blithesome and halcyon. To have faith in God,
Even if 'God', perhaps, is not a word
We should use for a generation, is faith
In more than truth, for Jesting Pilate was inspired
To ask the question from the Way, the Truth and the Life.
The joke was on him, we presume. A reluctant revolution
Is dying daily: difficult to admit
That what we know to be true is no longer true.
As we stand on our dung-heap of ideas and crow,
He slips away whispering 'I Am', to break bread
Just when we're discussing his non-existence,
As we know from time to time but not in time.

And Bishop John Robinson left his scholarship,
Waiting to see what he would learn from cancer.

*

There's no abiding city here.
A gentleman's
Enfranchised everywhere.
But being at home everywhere
Is to be at home nowhere.

The Son of Man hath not where
To lay his head.
Even the dead
Have laid their heads
Where they're not.

We've had far to go
And have further.
There's no emptiness
Like where home was,
And it won't get less.

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In the tale the prodigal son
Staggers back home
And sees his father running.
We've gone further
We're not who we were.

Our father's stranger too, no longer
In that Old Folks' Home.
We might not recognize him—
Or, shocked, try to revise him,
Perhaps disguise him?

To meet an old friend
After forty years
Is to know, though,
That what you've lost in going
Doesn't go.

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VINAY DHARWADKER

The Myth of the Good Prince

Dara Shikoh, 1615-1659

I

Like ordinary men in any place, you were given
Bad times to live in, which you could not change,
And even if you were to live among us now, again,
Your destiny would still be no different,
Condemned as you were to repeat it, absolutely alone.

Eleventh in descent from Tamburlane,
You risked the lash of recklessness until the end—
No exigencies of state, or freshly minted coin
Blazoning your begum's name, or even your own,
Cured you of the sacred illness of poems:

Cool in the breeze wafted through your pavilion,
You sat and slowly latticeworked your supreme
Ephemeral calligraphy on sheafs of parchment,
Even as a horde of nameless artisans composed
That stone epiphany, the Taj, your mother's tomb.

II

On sombre evenings at the Fort you paced the garden,
Sometimes resting on the marble seat beside the pool,
And listened to the priests from Lisbon and Holland
Who practised ways of worship you had never dreamed,
Or sat distracted by the water's rhythms, brooding
On the filigree of verses in Sanskrit and Persian.

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Your slaves and guards watched you with apprehension
Each time you prepared for the yearly journey north
Where you set up your unconventional camp,
Engaging in esoteric disputations,
Letting wife and sister step outside their veils
And walk with you like equals everywhere you went.

III

Wherever you now are, you will always invent
The same green slopes shaded by pine and chinaar
Looking out to the great white northern snows,
Where you listened to saint and shaman chant

In the frenzy of their solitary meditations,
Deciphering their alphabet of secret signs
To ferret out the future, learning to spell
The numerous names of the same invisible God.

Gathered into a congenial silence, you still invoke
The familiar images of the rose and nightingale,
Revealing how the fire's tongues murmur to the moth
Even as they consume its delicate wings.

IV

And so you never noticed the trace of doom
That spiralled through your life, unhelped by friends.
Your brother chose the moment you might have chosen,
Had you not lacked his skill with elimination:
Mercenaries brought you back to Delhi in chains,
Mounted you on an unwashed elephant, jeered your rags
In the city's streets and lanes.

A court of pious mullahs and noblemen
Rehearsed the grim Koran to judge you an apostate,
Condemning you to a fate you could not understand

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Even in the bare dungeon where, locked for a month,
Nothing mattered except the memory of poems
And prayers memorized in an alien tongue.

Elsewhere, imprisoned in his solitary bed,
Your ailing father watched the figure of the Taj
Reflected in glass, unable to save his favorite son.
As you rose from your prayers one evening,
The door opened and your four executioners stepped in:
At that moment, your rosary of fervent mutterings
Recounted neither Allah nor Rama, but a woman—

Mary, Mother of Jesus, you said, save your son.

NOTES ON CONTRIBUTORS

YVES HERSANT* has divided his professional life between embassies (as cultural attaché) and universities, and is now an associate professor at the Ecole des Hautes Etudes en Sciences Sociales in Paris, where he directs a seminar in melancholia. Anxious not to let himself be contaminated by his subject, he has taken a break this winter to teach at New York University.

DENIS BELLOCQ* is employed at the French Embassy in New York. He can be seen on stage in many French-American plays produced in both languages.

Although he has been affiliated with many university English departments (Wayne State, Brooklyn College, Indiana University Northwest, among others), HAROLD FROMM* has for the past few years been working as an unaffiliated scholar in the humanities. He has written widely on the Woolfs.

DAVID ROBERTSON* is an associate professor of English at the University of California, Davis. He is the author of *The Old Testament and the Literary Critic* and *West of Eden: A History of the Art and Literature of Yosemite*.

An associate professor of literature at The American University in Washington, D.C., KERMIT MOYER* lives with his wife and two dogs in Washington Grove, Maryland.

DANA GIOIA now works in acquisitions and mergers for a major New York corporation. His first full-length book of poems, *Daily Horoscope*, will appear next spring from Graywolf Press.

HERBERT LOMAS lives in London and Aldeburgh (Crabbe and Britten territory), where he has bought a boat and is learning to sail. *Letters in the Dark*, his seventh book, will be published by Oxford in March 1986. He is currently translating contemporary Finnish poetry for a new volume.

VINAY DHARWADKER* is a Special Humanities Fellow at the University of Chicago.

DENNIS SAMPSON's* first collection of poems, *The Double Genesis*, is reviewed in this issue.

(continued on page 694)

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DENNIS SAMPSON

Water Strider, Coming into the Light

Delighted to be alive,
skittering, alone
in most ways known to me,
you flit,
with nothing to say.

Maybe this will give you
some comfort: one little slip-up
in a wave
and you'll wake,
delighted to finally speak.

For now
just go on skittering back
and forth
on a green pond,
delighted, with nothing to say.

Alone in most ways
known to us,
you just
wake up and are here,
delighted, deeply alive.

Michelangelo, Dante, Milton
(all lovers of light),
are nothing to you,
skittering
here, now there,
on a green pond—delighted, lovely, alive.

Being a lover
of life God made because
He could not bear to be alone,

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you simply wake up
and are here,
delighted, deeply alive.

Even you
have a duty you don't
desire. What is it?
To do what? Above
a green pond
with nothing to say

I too
am delighted, by you,
whom I can see in this light.

The Message

When did you stop kissing me
I heard the girl in the blue dress say
as I passed, unprepared for such
a disturbing question in the dusk
outside the pool hall. Head down,
her lover looked long between her breasts
then I was gone out of that
predicament forever, following the oak trees
home in the near dark, with her
impeccable question still
in my ears. Last week
I learned of the death of a reckless
friend—death by water—who dove drunk
into the river and never,
at least deliberately, rose again.
They hooked him and hung him out to dry,
the wake too far away to be attended
by me or anyone I know. Now
I watch the living room lights
of my neighbors' houses shine
across the lawns, and feel
the human burden once again

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bear me toward home. Here,
as elsewhere, the red and yellow
leaves are falling into rain gutters
and while the wind
has won my heart a time or two
tonight it is tiresomely persistent,
a source of grief
to the man with blisters on his hands.
Each house harbors its solitary self
against the storm, letting her out at dawn.
In there, that antebellum house
hit by lightning only a month ago,
the father is writing at the table
and a woman flashes twice
behind the curtain. No sign
of anything other than a normal life,
gin and tonics, a little wooziness before the meal,
unlike the lives of those that I imagine
in Bryce Hospital at the edge of town,
terror, the tortured try of wives
to reconcile the compassionate father
with the husband harnessed
to a bed. Belief
in the indestructible heart of man,
a better life, hard work—
the lunatic laughs
and while the others look at him
they do not laugh. And the nurses, nebulous as swans,
stride back and forth among
the mad, so serious,
beautiful in their bright
white frocks and caps. At home,
I am too tired to eat
so turn on the television and regret
not having helped the boy
to his feet, who flung his bike
against a tree today and wept
and wept. What we do
and suffer, down to the pain of a match
against the hand, deserves the recognition
of a God. Make up.
Give in. Go jump in a lake.
But the wind keeps whispering to me over and over again.

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Human Fallibility

The monarch butterfly has flown in
from a long way off

to bask on the blossom of daisy fleabane
this dawn, this day

I will remember for the monarch butterfly
drifting and alone

throughout the shade and sunlight of October.
Now, with one flutter,

I see the brilliant brown and orange butterfly
shift a little

so suddenly she is looking up
from under a cluster

of blossoms.

Who really cares what the butterfly
claims as her own

other than these perfectly irrelevant blossoms
and her lover,

so bitter about the adoration
she lavishes on a world of flowers and yellowing leaves?

Her lover is gone,
given over to the drift of the pines.

Suddenly, she flutters
to another, grateful for her radiance in the radiance of dawn,

spreading her great golden wings
to dry.

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ALFRED DORN

Masks

For Joseph Campbell

I collect masks—wood, metal, ivory—
Tricked out with feathers, shells, or monkey hair,
Worn by Japanese actors in *Noh* plays,
By dancers in Tibet to become demons,
By shamans in Siberia turned to bears,
By Luba witch doctors to ward off plagues.

I do not collect skulls. When an old sailor
Offered to sell one cheap that he had bought
From a New Guinea tribe in 1912,
I eyed and handled it but would not buy.
To own something that once held speech and thought
Would be, I feared, going too near the bone—

Though I believe it would have blended well
With those false faces hanging on the wall
Which men put on to meet their buried selves,
Talk with their gods, persuade their guardian ghosts
(The totem beasts painted and carved on poles)
To guide the living with death's riper lore.

The skull, too, is a mask: it never looks
Anything like the face that grows on bone.
Only the face seems real, the skull disguise.
Yet every mask is worn over the face
And easily slipped off. But the firm skull
Remains unchanged beneath the changing skin.

This ivory death on which we live survives

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The flesh it waits a lifetime to unmask,
While the chameleon face hoodwinks all eyes—
Even its own. If we dropped every guise,
Would anything be left? Perhaps a god
Who has no face, though he is in all faces,
Who hides forever, wearing us as masks.

Blue

You are not mourning's dress
nor the ink of dreams gone dry.
You are a sapphire
polished by sunlight,

a Morpho butterfly
skimming a rain forest,
its wings a five-inch fan
of solid sky,

harebell and gentian,
the eyes in a peacock's tail,
the flower that Novalis
sought in the Invisible.

Color of reflection,
color of our silences,
you dazzle us out of our dust,
immortal laughter of space.

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CHARLES MARTIN

Speech against Stone

I watch the man in the schoolyard
As he brushes a flat coat of institutional beige
Over a wall brilliant with childish graffiti,
Turning a fresh page,

A surface the kids will respray
As soon as his back is turned. I suppose I should
Be thinking—as any upstanding, taxpay-
ing citizen would—

Of the money and man-hours spent
Covering up these phosphorescent hues
And adolescent cries of discontent;
But as he continues,

I find myself divided:
The huge roller goes sweeping on over the stone,
And I see, in what he is doing, a labor
Not unlike my own

When I erase, letter by letter,
The words I've just written, in the hope that all
My scratching out may summon something better—
And besides, the wall

Surely approves of this work,
For who can believe that it would choose to say
FUCK THE WORLD or *FAT ANTHONYS A JERK*
Or *DMF JOSE*?

No, left to its own devices,
The wall would stand forever an unlettered book,

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Prepared to meet eternity's inspection
With its own blank look.

But that, of course, is what summons
The hidden children out of their hiding places,
That inviting blankness as the janitor finally covers
Up the last traces,

Gathers together his painting
Gear and goes clattering off. No sooner gone
Than they return to renew the ancient complaint
Of speech against stone,

Spelling out—misspelling, often—
The legends of the heart's lust for joy and violence
In waves that break upon but will not soften
The cliffs of obdurate silence.

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PETER MAKUCK

Owl and Heron, Months Apart

An all-day drive through dead August air
that turns to fry-noise at sixty—
    I at last take a break.
Some Carolina rib shack by a river.
Walk out on the wooden planks of a bridge.
Not a breeze thinks of stirring.
The day's going down in flames.
On the dark riverglass my face
is replaced by bright wood, varnished, moving,
woolly gray hair,
a pair of strong black arms—a silver canoe
        drawing out my breath.
The current is fast but he's all ease against it
this old man, all ease and skill,
and just before he's taken by the bend,
the blade of his paddle flashes
and I could swear I see
a tall white bird take flight, flap
behind its long neck, glide, and hide itself
in tall slackwater reeds.
    A breeze starts in the tree tops,
        a long descending whisper,
            cool over the arms and face.
Two more hours at the wheel.

Last January, on my way to friends
with jars of white-
lightning for a cold cabin afternoon, I saw
a white-bibbed owl; it swooped
across the dirt road, this bird
I had only seen in my father's shed—
a picture on a cigar box.
From a high dead limb,

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it dove
and flapped toward the fastness of deeper woods,
that great owl on the wing
deeper and deeper with its hunting light.

Now owl and heron light the air
of the long hard dark between.

JAMES F. MAYBURY

Autumn Song

Jade dewdrops are on the wounded and
withered maple leaves,
and a harsh wind wails through the Sorceress Gorge.
In the midst of the river
waves gush and mount to heaven,
while on the distant prairies
scudding clouds
fuse the darkness of earth and sky.
Chrysanthemums in bloom
remind me of past tears.
A lone boat is tossed on the spray,
and suddenly I think of home.
Everything urges us to prepare for winter,
so at dusk
high in the city
of the White Emperor,
I hear the rapid beats
as clothes are dried on stone.

[*A translation of the Chinese poem by Du Fu*]

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EVAN ZIMROTH

Morning Coffee on Isle la Motte

I am coherently
happy now: drip coffee this lovely, windy
summer Saturday a.m. into my small, cracked
pink art-deco pot, hot milk in its
companion yellow creamer. My blue

art-deco cup
is genuine Woolworth's '36, aglow
in pre-war, post-depression glaze.
With muffins, coffee, and butter-knife
engraved Fifth Avenue Hotel (once family-

owned, and family-
thieved), I spread before me
inherited rubrics of 20th-century
commercial style. My Armenian neighbor
ambles by to bring a book on Turkish pogroms

in World War I.
The family expelled from Sivas, whipped through
desert to Aleppo. A woman grabs back her child,
gets hands sliced off like bread, like breasts,
by a Turkish scimitar. Girl raped and raped, then

still. Learn to
swallow gold rings for safe-keeping; rake
them later out of your shit. Death of Mariam,
age 6, quiet, in a saddle-bag. The Euphrates
filled with bodies, yet drinkable. Serop, now old,

orphaned at
the same age as my small daughter, survived

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by tending sheep for local Turks; he
will not mention it for 70 years. We do,
each safe in our own diaspora, over coffee

brewed American-
style as some local boys wind-surf on the lake
blowing like a scarf before us. Somewhere
in this urgent world, the terrorists are reading maps,
taking aim, replenishing their guns, but

the lawn
is empty here, wild-flowered, over-long.
I don't know where my own children are:
out with their father somewhere, safely havened,
filling buckets, throwing stones at the blown scarf of lake.

HENRI COLE

Dorothy's Fossils

Ninety million years ago a duck-billed
dinosaur chased and caught a *gillius*,

a fleshy fish of alga-blue
in a sudden, dogtoothed move

that left the fish unhinged, its spine
drifting downward through legions of wine

dark sea into murky bottom waters
where its vertebra would catch like a spur,

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become coated with lime and flourish
in an oyster bed's fertile niche.

Ninety million years later
Dorothy, my childhood mate,

lay serpent-like on a cool fieldstone.
The summer's splendor sputtered and shone

all afternoon: Dorothy's freckles diaphanous
in the sunlight, her fragile frock mussed

from our wriggling play. Dorothy lay
in a pool of molten green rays—

her body sunken in a posture of sleep,
her carrot-red hair like sea-lettuce sweeping

above the tall aquatic grass—
when the earth beside her fragile cheek hatched

in the heat of the sun, and the fieldstone's
long oppressed trace of Jurassic life untombed

itself before Dorothy, the sleeping child,
who awoke beside the shards of riddled flint,

her heart thrumming like a bird's,
to find the perfect spine unearthed and electric beside her.

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HAROLD WITT

Strange, in a Beesmelling Dream,

symbol of love or hope—
I lay there bare in the sun
while you ate cantaloupe,

sitting there spooning it in
orange on silver toward red
while with buttocks exposed
I sunned and nothing was said—

a naked man on grass,
a lady florally dressed
smiling down at my back,
eating like one obsessed

melon luscious as love,
emblem of sensuous touch—
I sweated and didn't move,
the gold drops fell in the sun

and one hissed on my skin
as the spoon went down with a gleam—
whatever we really wished
never appeared in the dream.

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MARCIA B. SIEGEL

Kabuki for Beginners

THE GREAT EVENT OF THE SUMMER was the two-week season of the Grand Kabuki of Japan at the Metropolitan Opera House. Although Kabuki sold out the house in its last visit three years ago, promoters and producers seemed apprehensive that the company wouldn't be understood this time. The spectacular aspects of Kabuki were pressed on us through a repertory preoccupied with violent acts and loaded with juicy showcase opportunities for stars and "matinee idols." Finally even knowledgeable writers became absorbed in matters of refinement and kitsch: the *Village Voice*'s Eileen Blumenthal called the season "splashy, trashy entertainment raised to exquisite art," making it sound like the routine of some born-again Sally Rand. The Japanese impresarios of the troupe even had the Met distribute a questionnaire reeking with self-consciousness and doubts: "What do you think of the elocution of the actors? Exciting—strange—pleasant—unpleasant—too unfamiliar for enjoyment. What is your impression of the Onnagata (female impersonator)? Strange—wonderful—ridiculous—beautiful—unnatural—disgusting—charming—others (please specify) . . . "

Not surprisingly, with this kind of prompting, the audience often behaved like provincials. People clung to their headsets and laughed only when cued by Faubion Bowers' simultaneous translations, seeming not to notice obvious physical jokes. Bowers would sometimes fill in the "pauses" when no one was speaking with helpful hints about the costumes, biographies of the actors and so forth. This travelogue approach is supposed to keep us from getting bored, but in practice it draws our attention from the stage action and speeds up the naturally slow unfolding of a Kabuki plot. It's like watching a documentary about Kabuki at the same time we're watching Kabuki itself.

In some sense, the best way to look at a foreign theater or ritual form is as an anthropologist doing field work. You fill yourself in on the history, color and symbolism beforehand, but when you come in contact with the real thing, you try to experience it as nearly like a native as you can. Kabuki plays have very complicated plots, it's true, but the management provided excellent plot summaries in the program (by Peter Grilli), and for the rest, we're not so hooked on verbalization that we can't figure out what's going on. On a story level, Kabuki isn't much more mystifying than classical ballet, and the New York audience long since stopped having trou-

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ble with that. Simultaneous translation sometimes helps to give the flavor of a character, and there's no doubt that it supplies the literal content of the play in a way only language can. When you become dependent on it, however, I think you lose much of the real quality of Kabuki, which lies in subtle acting that conveys a tremendous range of characters, emotions, and human conflict.

Kabuki is always spoken of as a popular theater form, but perhaps populist is a better word. Of course audiences appreciate the gorgeous costumes and magical stage effects, but above all these plays portray a society that has flexible class boundaries. Feudal Japan was totally stratified, but a person's status could rise or fall with a sudden turn of fortune. People kept apart by rigid social codes could enter each other's lives through commerce, warfare, and a very active netherworld of mercenary crime and genteel prostitution. Kabuki, in fact, had its origins 300 years ago in the red–light district of Kyoto, and its initial source of support was the merchant classes, not the aristocracy. The literature that comes down to us today, built up in the intervening centuries, celebrates not the rigid protocols of empire, as does European classical ballet, but the vital and heterogeneous middle class, struggling to assert itself in a world it's going to inherit. Kabuki borrows from all the surrounding theater and literary forms, so its conventions are broadly appealing. It can be stiffly ceremonial, slow and sad, comic, formal, or ordinary, sometimes all in the same play. Almost always it comments on the values and foibles of society.

The characters in the plays derived from Kyogen, the comic interludes of the even more ancient Noh dramas, are lovable even while they're sly, stupid, or predatory. In *Tachi Nusu-Bito* (*The Sword Thief*), a bumpkin is robbed while on a visit to the big city. A doddering magistrate tries to determine who the disputed sword belongs to but he has to keep asking his assistant what to do next. It's like a scene among some minor characters in a Mozart opera. The thief is lantern-jawed, hunched over, crafty. The victim is wide-eyed and credulous—too busy gawking at the sights to notice when the thief slips the sword from under his belt.

The thief, played superbly by Onoe Tatsunosuke, is a master of bravado, and when discovered, he pretends the bumpkin is trying to steal the sword from him. By using his wits he's almost able to convince the authorities, but he's finally exposed when the owner tells the history of the sword in a dance. If he owned the sword, the thief would have to know this dance too, and he copies it as faithfully as he can while the bumpkin is doing it. His efforts are hilarious—he fudges complicated rhythms and whips around the edges of gestures like the sleight-of-hand artist that he is—but finally he just can't keep up. He pulls a last-minute switch, though; as the bumpkin is thanking the magistrate, he snatches the sword again and runs off.

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In much of the world's theater, the "low" characters provide the comedy while the aristocrats and rulers preserve proper decorum. This isn't from disrespect, but familiarity. The characters who are the most fallible are the ones the audience most identifies with, and—especially in Kabuki—the higher, purer, more solemn types exemplify standards of honor unattainable for the average person. The equation is borne out in the acting style. Kyogen characters are usually humble or naive, street-smart or pompous, and they act in an almost naturalistic idiom. The nobles and high officials in the more dramatic plays move and speak with ritual restraint. They aren't bloodless, far from it; but their passions never burst the seams of formality. One of the chief pleasures of Kabuki, in fact, is the way the actors stretch the limits of their characters' conventions.

At one extreme is the *aragoto* play, where the style is so exaggerated that bombast alone seems to carry the day. *Shibaraku* (*Just a Moment*), probably the most typical of the *aragoto* plays, has a long, quite static opening, where the representatives of a defeated army (the good guys) and their conquerors relate what has happened. The good-guy leaders are about to be executed, and will submit stoically, but the real drama of the play lies in the appearance of Kagemasa, a fantastic, half-magical hero. We've been led up to it by the entrances of various thugs and villains, each bigger and fiercer than the ones before. The lowest-ranking goons have hulking big bellies and red faces. Their leader is more refined but is also muscle-bound, and wears red under his white robe.

But just at the crucial moment Kagemasa appears, huger and more menacing than any of them, to save the day. His costume is padded and layered and amplified with ornaments, masklike make-up, and platform shoes, and when he moves, a tremendous power and tension spreads through his body in all directions. When he speaks his voice oscillates from forceful yelling to drawn-out squealing and growling sounds. Everyone else on the scene is immediately cowed by his very presence. When he cuts off the heads of eight bad-guy soldiers with one swipe of his oversized sword, the act is so non-naturalistic that you can almost miss it; he could be blowing them down.

The Kagemasa role is associated with one of the great Kabuki families, that of Ichikawa Danjuro, and it was given this year as a showpiece for the newest successor to that line, the actor formerly known as Ebizo X. A version of *Kojo*, the ceremony in which he declares himself ready and aspiring to carry on the great tradition, was included on the same program. After short congratulatory speeches by the other principal members of the company, all dressed in plain black kimono and kneeling in a line across the stage, Ebizo, now Danjuro XII, performed a famous pose or *mie* from his repertoire. To a Westerner, this might seem a bizarre idea, but it illustrates very well the value the Japanese place on achieving

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exactly the right placement and intensity to project a single image on the mind. In a few seconds the actor recreates what a printmaker labors at for hours or days. The more I look at Kabuki, the more I appreciate the economy and precision of sentiment with which it can animate happenings that might otherwise be flamboyant or involuted.

Nearly immobile, with a weak voice that seemed to come from somewhere far back in his upper spine, Danjuro also played the invalid warlord Yorimitsu in a play derived from a Noh theme, *Tsuchigumo* (*The Earth Spider*). This is basically a dance play, with several solos and a stately choreographed battle at the end. Shoroku, the company director, plays a demon spider who first masquerades as a priest in order to get into Yorimitsu's chamber and kill him. Yorimitsu's retainers suspect something is wrong, though, and chase the spider back to his lair.

The second part of the play begins with stage-setting preparations like the carrying in of floor-cloth and props that preceded Danjuro's *mie* in the *Kojo* ceremony. As we watch the stage assistants carefully arranging objects, our curiosity is aroused, and the subsequent events seem even more wonderful after we've seen the mundane preliminaries. Here, a tall draped boxy object is carried in. When the scene actually begins, Yorimitsu's men are hunting the spider's lair. They pull away the curtains from the set-piece, and inside, lurking behind his web, is the demon, dressed in splendid robes and terrifying makeup. He slashes away the web and jumps out. The spider fights the soldiers with a single weapon, his web, using it like a net in a medieval jousting contest. The "web" is a handful of silvery paper streamers that the demon throws at each attacker. The streamers fan out and entangle the opponent, momentarily stopping his advance. A stage assistant whisks the paper shreds away in a big ball and the battle continues. This simple device is one of the most stunning effects ever put on a stage. The spider demon is finally defeated, but for his timing and agility, as well as the beauty of his person and his trick, you almost wish he'd won.

I often have conflicting reactions to the characters in Kabuki, and the plays that get under my skin are the psychological studies where the protagonists are gripped by opposing motives and desires. The two young stars of the touring company, Tamasaburo and Takao, were featured in *Kasane* and *Sakura-hime Azuma Bunsho*. Of all the plays in the season, *Kasane* seemed the most melodramatic and sensationalized to me—a story about rejected love, revenge, and possession. Tamasaburo plays a beautiful noblewoman whose attachment to her samurai lover brings about the downfall of them both. In the course of the play each one becomes more and more degraded. He's running away from the authorities because of a lapse in duty, she tells him she's pregnant, and they decide to commit double sui-

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cide. Then it's revealed that the lover, Yoemon, had long ago murdered Kasane's father. Gradually she succumbs to her father's avenging ghost—which cripples and disfigures her. Then there's a long, demented chase as Yoemon tries to kill her, and she clings to him in piteous and finally demonic adoration mixed with hatred.

Though the actors were wonderful in *Kasane*, *Sakura-hime* (*The Scarlet Princess of Edo*) had a similar theme but a deeper psychological insight. I should say, the six-act play of *Sakura-hime* is deeper than the excerpts of it that were performed in New York. I saw the whole play in Tokyo a few years ago, and was severely disappointed that the producers entrusted New York with only the more sensational parts.

The complete play concerns a noblewoman who falls in love with a scoundrel, Gonsuke. She's disgraced and thrown out on the streets. In her subsequent life as an outcast, her inborn nobility never deserts her, even when she's sold into prostitution by the good-for-nothing lover. The third member of this lopsided triangle is Seigen, the priest, who loves Princess Sakura with a passion that grows more abject the more she rejects him. The underlying plot of the play is Princess Sakura's effort to regain the position of her family, which has been deposed by the villain Akugoro. After years of suffering she symbolically triumphs over her lustful failings, gaining back the family's credentials in the process. On a spiritual level, the play deals with karma, the living-out of preordained struggle in order to attain grace or free oneself of a stigma. And on a social level it represents the weakness of the effete upper classes and the gut survival of the masses. Among the triumphs of this play is the fact that Gonsuke and Seigen are played by the same actor, in this case Takao, while Tamasaburo plays both Seigen's boy-lover and the Princess Sakura.

Tamasaburo's portrayal of the scarlet princess ranges from delicacy and a dignity almost amounting to primness, to sensuality and, in a final scene not given here, a disconcerting blend of coarseness and refinement. Although we were denied the complete transformation of the character, the first scene between Sakura and Gonsuke already shows the cracks in her aristocratic facade. They meet, ironically, just as she's about to become a nun. On the verge of renouncing all worldly desires, she not only is attracted to this common, earthy stranger, but actually seduces him. What makes the scene truly erotic is the contrast between her initial containment—movements small and confined to peripheral head tilts and hand gestures—and the curving, swaying waves of passion that engulf her. But even responding to Gonsuke's crude gestures—he puts a hand inside her kimono, a barefoot leg astride her abdomen—she preserves an outward composure and never gets wantonly sloppy.

Unlike the priest, Seigen, Sakura's sensuality doesn't betray her strength of character. With her it's a human if near-disastrous flaw.

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Seigen's lust is consuming, obsessive, and fundamental—noble trappings are for him an ineffectual disguise. He becomes infatuated with Sakura because he thinks she's a reincarnation of his homosexual lover Shiragikumaru, with whom he formed a suicide pact eighteen years before. At the last minute Seigen was too cowardly to go through with it, and he's haunted by guilt when he encounters what he thinks is his dead lover. He too becomes an outcast when he's mistaken for Sakura's secret lover, and he gradually wastes away as a beggar in the countryside searching for her. Gonsuke, on the other hand, suffers no guilt whatsoever, though he's committed casual murder and treacherous acts of all kinds, and no punishment until Sakura finally kills him. He's a tremendously appealing character even though disreputable.

In his death scene, Seigen is far more dissipated than the two who've frankly gratified their desires. Sniveling, sick, and without a trace of self-respect left, he begs Sakura to kill him and fails even in that appeal. (He tumbles onto his dagger, which has landed in an open grave as they struggled.) But even he has some sympathetic qualities; in scenes that were omitted he cares for Sakura's child by Gonsuke and only gradually becomes a cringing ghoul.

In these domestic plays particularly, what is intriguing, what stays in your mind, is the layers of character that are revealed. It seems to me a diminution of the actors' training and tradition to show them as simply crooks, fallen maidens or quavering perverts. *Sakura-hime* is a fascinating study, full of ironic coincidences and heart-breaking turns of the plot, betrayals by vicious underlings, atavistic loyalties that survive years of separation, comic indignities and grotesque efforts to save face. I hope we can enjoy all of it—or another full-length Kabuki play—next time the company visits here.

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VERNON YOUNG

The Fine Art of Film Adaptation

THE PROBLEMS AND THE CHALLENGE OF FILM ADAPTATION have rarely been met and for the most part overcome as they were in two recent films, from Italy and England respectively.

In Luigi Pirandello's play, *Enrico Quarto*, from which the film (directed by Marco Bellochio) was derived, Henry, a rich young Roman, at the turn of the century, staging an historical pageant, has assumed the role of Henry IV, the eleventh–century Emperor of Germany (he who kneeled at Canossa). Matilde Spina, with whom, unrequited, Henry is madly in love, is dressed as Matilde of Tuscany, historically the enemy of the German Henry. During a cavalcade, in which many guests of Henry participate, his rival-in-love, Belcredi, goads Henry's horse into rearing and throwing his rider. (We learn only later that the provocateur was Belcredi.) Although he appears at first not to have been seriously injured, it soon transpires that Henry is mad and believes himself to be in fact the medieval Emperor.

For twelve years thereafter he lives in a castle with retainers who serve him as if he were indeed the German potentate; all guests are compelled by his insensate behavior to impersonate historical contemporaries and don period clothing when they visit him. After twelve years he regains his sanity but he then finds it impossible to take up his former life. Matilde has been living with his hated rival, the malignant Belcredi, who was responsible for his fall and his years of oblivion. He soon realizes, besides, with sad cynicism, that he can intimidate anyone, even those deemed authoritative, into accepting his now histrionic insanity. He chooses, therefore, to remain mad in seeming. Eight years later the play, proper, begins, with a new servitor discovering to his chagrin that he has boned up on the wrong Henry—Henri IV of France! Not until the middle of Act Two are we informed that Henry's present madness is dissembled. (In the film version this revelation comes at about the same point in the scenario.) Bellochio, updating the events to the present day, has substituted for Pirandello's opening the approach to the castle across country of a carful of visitors comprising Matilde (Claudia Cardinale), whose reminiscences en route give us the early episodes of the story; Belcredi, her lover; Frida, her illegitimate daughter; and a doctor, self-confident on the subject of insanity. These sequences, taking up over half the film, out-of-doors and edited at a lively, almost feverish tempo, compose a striking contrast to the fi-

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nal section in the sunless gloom of the castle where time has stopped.

The doctor has decided that if they confront Henry with Matilde and Frida both dressed as Matilde of Tuscany, the shock of seeing the two women as one will restore to him his lapsed conception of time. Henry is indeed violently affected by this presentation but with a negative ferocity not expected by the doctor. He is made suddenly and furiously aware that by choosing to remain the pseudo-Emperor for the sake of his fictive power over others, he has confined himself to immobility. The others, for all their blindness, have lived and changed and now want him to tear off his mask and live in their way. When he seizes Frida to carry her off into a new life which is to compensate him for his years of insensibility, Belcredi protests the action and Henry, in a spurt of rage, kills him. With that stroke (*in the play*), he seals his fate; as a justification for his deed he must remain the madman he had pretended to be.

You can see by this synopsis, in which I have leaned heavily on the original, that to a present-day movie audience questions of moral realism, not to say common sense, threaten the assumptions of Pirandello's drama, written in 1922. In the theater, we are willing to suspend our disbeliefs because the play is framed by its time-set (we do this habitually with Ibsen), but in the movies we are less prone to go along with what we impatiently note as inconsistencies, or social contradictions. That Henry would be allowed to remain in his castle as Henry IV after killing a man is of course the more unacceptable when the story has been re-situated sixty years later than Pirandello's.

More important than this is the fact that after sixty years of Freudian hypotheses, we cannot seriously condone a man who has chosen to live literally in the past because he claims to have seen through the hypocrisies of his fellow men in the present. Pirandello's play takes place in a dimension far removed from the reality we inhabit—which is part of its strength, theatrically seen—and Bellochio wisely recognized the distance while, at the same time, he treated with respect the darker intimations of the author's attitude. For Pirandello, Henry was not a misguided solipsist, to the limits of the grotesque, but a tragic hero, in the mold of Hamlet, with whose pessimistic *raison d'etre* he felt sympathetic.

The temper of Bellochio's movie is less favorable to Henry's moral absolutism and the conclusion is a deliberately staged anti-climax. As in the play, Henry stabs Belcredi but with a collapsible sword. He draws blood and the others rush Belcredi off to a hospital as they argue, on the way, whether or not Henry is certifiably mad. But clearly Belcredi is not mortally wounded and Henry is not doomed. I feel sure that Bellochio has considerably defused the drama of the original, not from ignorance but from a concern for its greater feasibility. For this reason, the doctor in the film (played with his usual perfection of touch by Leopoldo Trieste) is not mere-

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ly a personification of self-importance. Psychiatry is, after all, relevant to Henry's simulated retreat, which we are inclined to see as absurd rather than tragic. Matilde, all to the good, is given greater weight in the film scenario. Claudia Cardinale's expressive close-up reactions dominate the flashback half of the narrative. Henry, himself, is somewhat more volatile in this version, often less sardonic than supercilious: resonant, all the same, in his powerful outbreaks of kingly wrath. (This is Marcello Mastroianni in top form.) Belcredi is lost in the shuffle. I have always thought that he was not depicted as unfavorably as he might have been, considering Henry's excessive hostility towards him. In the movie he has little definable character.

Whatever limitations are suggested by these reductions of intensity, the film is distinguished by Bellochio's good intentions, by his thoughtful regard for Pirandello's atmosphere of fatality and for the extent to which that atmosphere can be made to submit to our so different readings of human calamity.

Inattention, however, is surprisingly a specter at the feast. The young Henry, egregiously in the scene where he goes berserk with his costume sword, is left-handed. By the time he has become Mastroianni he is so no longer. I hoped a symbolic intention would be disclosed but none was. It was simply an oversight!

No comparable error disturbs the impeccable surface continuity of *The Return of the Soldier*, adapted by Hugh Whitemore from Rebecca West's first novel (1918) and directed with meticulous control, every foot of the way, by Alan Bridges. Since "production design" is credited to one Luciano Arighi, this name, as well as those of the scenarist and the director, will have to stand in my brief account for all the experts of photography, decor, period costuming and the like who were enlisted.

Normally, one would not associate the worlds of Pirandello and Rebecca West. By a coincidence of my seeing these films in the same week, I was more aware than I might have been otherwise that they do have in common as their hero a man who has chosen, under stress, to step out of time. And there is at least one speech in *The Return of the Soldier* (lifted almost whole from the novel into the film) which could well have been spoken in *Henry IV* if Pirandello's doctor had been as worldly as Rebecca West's. While attempting to cure the loss of memory incurred by the central male character, he says: "It's my profession to bring people from various outlying districts of the mind to the normal. There seems to be a general feeling it's the place where they ought to be. Sometimes I don't see the urgency myself."

As a novelette written under the spell of Henry James but indelibly committed to a more concretely visual setting than any you'll find in the fiction of the master, *The Return of the Soldier* is a *tour de*

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force of prose which, in the motion picture medium, is even richer; every setting, every witness point of the story, has been with anxious fidelity vivified. Whitemore and Bridges treated the original not simply as a literary source but as a virtual shooting script. I don't contend that this is an indispensable requirement, nor even a necessary one. *In this instance* it was a sovereign strategy.

Chris Baldry, a member of the foxhound gentry and, according to the narrator, possessed of a "surpassing amiability which was so habitual that one took it as one of his physical characteristics," is sent home from the front during War I with his memory impaired, from shell shock ostensibly. Although he remembers certain aspects of his surroundings and a few friends, he has totally forgotten that he is married to the elegant Kitty, brittle, acquisitive and passionless (Julie Christie). He has skipped the intervening fifteen years to recapture his love for Margaret Allington (Glenda Jackson), daughter of an innkeeper (now married to a cipher named Grey, unglamorous and irresolute, but kind). Baldry surrenders himself to the illusion that he and Margaret are still madly in love with one another while Kitty, with outraged forbearance, permits this lower-middle-class alien to be their guest at Baldry Court, in the mistaken belief that Chris, after sustained confrontation, will suffer the shock of disillusion and dismiss his shabby inamorata. All this is observed by Jenny (Ann-Margret), Kitty's companion, Chris's cousin—in the book she is the first-person narrator—herself unconsciously in love with Baldry. To be limited to Jenny's perspective is of course a special device in the novel that necessarily prevents our knowing what happens between people when Jenny is not there to observe them. This would appear to be a hampering method for adoption in a film, where the ubiquitous camera does not encourage such an inhibition, but Whitemore and Bridges have utilized it frequently, without pursuing it consistently, to very striking effect; it fortifies suspense and enhances the austerity of the narration.

Margaret, who has everything to gain by accepting Baldry's illusion, selflessly understands that pleasure and reality are here incongruous; for she is in fact the suburban wife of the dim Mr. Grey, and Chris, lord of the manor, is married to the barracuda of his choice. She alone is the first to propose what the others have shirked: that they should remind Chris of the child he had by Kitty, who had died at the age of five; this, if anything, might shock him into the identity he has forsaken because it was burdened with an alliance he couldn't handle. Recovery, on his part, will of course be an intolerably mixed blessing; it will return him not only to the possessive frigidities of his wife but also to the trenches of France.

The final scene, in which Margaret does so confront Baldry (with articles from the nursery to revive his obscured memory) and in which his mind at last returns with a shudder to the realities from which he has abdicated, is staged, one may well say, with an unusual

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disregard for the kind of violent reaction we might have expected under such a circumstance. I am not sure it is plausible (clinically speaking), but it is impressive. Seen from the middle distance by Jenny at a window of the mansion, reporting to Kitty, it consists of a prolonged shot intercut only by Kitty in predatory close–up, as Chris walks away from Margaret towards the house while the cannons of distant war rumble faintly from across the Channel. Here is the substantial paragraph which inspired the sequence one sees, and hears, on film.

> He wore a dreadful decent smile; I knew how his voice would resolutely lift in greeting us. He walked not loose limbed like a boy, as he had done that very afternoon, but with the soldier's hard tread upon the heel. It recalled to me that, bad as we were, we were yet not the worst circumstance of his return. When we had lifted the yoke of our embraces from his shoulders he would go back to that flooded trench in Flanders under that sky more full of flying death than clouds, to that No Man's Land where bullets fell like rain on the rotting faces of the dead . . .
>
> "Jenny, aren't they there?"
> "They're both there."
> "Is he coming back?"
> "He's coming back."
> "Jenny, Jenny! How does he look?"
> "Oh . . ." How could I say it? "Every inch a soldier."
> She crept behind me to the window, peered over my shoulder and saw.
> I heard her suck her breath with satisfaction. "He's cured!" she whispered slowly. "He's cured!"

More than one of my friends found this film "depressing." If you dwell on the despotisms of class, the rigors of marital commitment, and the insanities of trench warfare in 1918, you may well become depressed. Yet we were, after all, looking at a *movie*—in which, for me, beauty outweighed truth: the acting of Alan Bates and the three women, the autumn-leaved landscape of Sussex, the selective accuracy of the living detail (the "tea-things," the vintage Rolls-Royce), the unfaltering skill with which Whitemore and Bridges evoked, against probability, the moral nuances of a taciturn, if remarkably trenchant, novel.

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MARVIN MUDRICK

The Dim Lamp

SOME OF THE INTEREST OF THESE MILES AND MILES OF INTERVIEWS[1] is finding out which of the writers come off better here than in their books, which of them worse, and which pretty much the same.

The moralists tend to come off pretty much the same, they imitate themselves with feeling, they pronounce and italicize, they wax indignant, they take their familiar stand; the bigger the issue the more they sound like themselves and each other, brandishing their truisms, making themselves clearer and clearer. Irwin Shaw, nostalgic for World War II, crossly deplores post-WWII war, a "kind of killing" that's less easy to lard with the ecumenical pieties: "This isn't even the kind of killing with regret, with compassion, that I tried to write about in *The Young Lions*." (An old lion bearing the cross, and cross as a bear.) Interviewer: "There was a sermon in *The Young Lions*, given by an old pastor in the ruined church at Dover. That was important, then?" Shaw: "Yes, that was very important. I tried to have that old man say what my only belief is about war"—viz. "When a soldier kills another soldier, he must kill with a sense of sin and tragedy." (War means always having to say you're sorry.) Interviewer, moving in for the merely metaphorical kill: "Would you say it was kind of an obsession with you, this compassion?" whereupon Shaw confirms that if the interviewer hadn't already said so that's exactly what he would say: "It's something I believe in strongly." For Susan Sontag too, modern war is a cross-eyed bear: "In 1968 I went to Vietnam, and my anguish about the war made it very hard for me to write." ("Difficult?" cried Dr. Johnson. "I wish it were impossible!") Or, if not death and destruction, why not a *really* big issue? like the one that exercises Arthur Miller: "it's got so we've lost the technique of grappling with the world that Homer had, that Aeschylus had, that Euripides had. And Shakespeare. [And, as long as we're being comprehensive, Sophocles.] How amazing it is that people who adore the Greek drama fail to see that these great works are works of a man confronting his society, the

[1] THE PARIS REVIEW INTERVIEWS: WRITERS AT WORK, ed. *George Plimpton* (except 1st Series, ed. *Malcolm Cowley*). Penguin. 1st Series, introd. *Malcolm Cowley*. $7.95. 2nd Series, introd. *Van Wyck Brooks*. $7.95. 3rd Series, introd. *Alfred Kazin*. $7.95. 4th Series, introd. *Wilfrid Sheed*. $8.95. 5th Series, introd. *Francine du Plessix Gray*. $8.95. 6th Series, introd. *Frank Kermode*. $9.95. CONVERSATIONS WITH AMERICAN WRITERS, by *Charles Ruas*. Knopf. $17.95.

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illusions of the society, the faiths of the society. They're social documents, not little piddling private conversations." The interviewers are visiting Miller at his farmhouse in the Connecticut hills, and when they first entered his study all was country-calm; but just wait: "Mr. Miller adjusted a microphone he had hung crookedly from the arm of his desk lamp. Then, quite casually, he picked up a rifle from the day bed and took a shot through the open louvers at a woodchuck who, scared but reprieved, scurried across the far slope. We were startled—he [Miller, not the woodchuck] smiled at our lack of composure. He said that his study was also an excellent duckblind." Among the gilt-edged uniform-binding great works a weird little piddling private moment—shooting the works, so to speak—which is at least livelier and less compassionate than the interview his guests pull themselves together to conduct or any of those high-minded plays of his.

On the other hand Joseph Heller and Kurt Vonnegut, Jr. sound alert, unpretentious, unimpressed by themselves, even likable, and almost anything else that couldn't be inferred from the mugging and moralizing laugh-tracks of their fiction. Heller for example tells a sobering anecdote about what it means to be a best-selling author with a rich friend:

> I have a friend I knew when I was a copywriter and he was a salesman for an art studio, and now he is rich. His name is Marvin Green. When I got sick [Heller was hospitalized for a year with a rare polio-like disease], he wrote out a check for three or four hundred thousand dollars for a 25 percent share in a novel I would write about my experience. He would give me the money right then. What he was doing was finding a way to help me out, while making what he felt was a sound investment. And I said, "Marvin, you'd be wasting your money. It's true I probably can get a million-dollar advance on a novel, but I'll only get that much if I do it. I don't know if I could write a book of fiction on my illness."

So Marvin must have exhaled a sigh of thwarted benevolence and settled back into pork-belly futures.

As for Vonnegut, he's even consistently and good-humoredly funny here in modes in which his novels don't usually do more than make excessive and ill-tempered efforts. "You just laughed about something," says the interviewer, and Vonnegut replies, "Oh—I just remembered something that happened in a high school course on civics, on how our government worked. The teacher asked each of us to stand up in turn and tell what we did after school. I was sitting in the back of the room, sitting next to a guy named J. T. Alburger. He later became an insurance man in Los Angeles. He died fairly recently. Anyway—he kept nudging me, urging me, daring

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me to tell the truth about what I did after school. He offered me five dollars to tell the truth. He wanted me to stand up and say, 'I make model airplanes and jerk off.' " Vonnegut wrote for the high school paper, and once in the *Echo* office,

> while I was writing, I happened to sniff my armpits absent-mindedly. Several people saw me do it, and thought it was funny—and ever after that I was given the name "Snarf." In the annual for my graduating class, the class of 1940, I'm listed as "Kurt Snarfield Vonnegut, Jr." Technically, I wasn't really a snarf. A snarf was a person who went around sniffing girls' bicycle saddles. I didn't do that. "Twerp" also had a very specific meaning, which few people know now. Through careless usage, "twerp" is a pretty formless insult now.
>
> INTERVIEWER: What is a twerp in the strictest sense, in the original sense?
>
> VONNEGUT: It's a person who inserts a set of false teeth between the cheeks of his ass.
>
> INTERVIEWER: I see.
>
> VONNEGUT: I beg your pardon; between the cheeks of his or *her* ass. I'm always offending feminists that way.
>
> INTERVIEWER: I don't quite understand why someone would do that with false teeth.
>
> VONNEGUT: In order to bite the buttons off the back seats of taxicabs. That's the only reason twerps do it. It's all that turns them on.

Vonnegut served in Irwin Shaw's favorite war, where he helped to operate a 240-millimeter howitzer:

> We would put the shell in there, and then we would throw in bags of very slow and patient explosives. They were damp dog biscuits, I think. We would close the breech, and then trip a hammer which hit a fulminate of mercury percussion cap, which spit fire at the damp dog biscuits. The main idea, I think, was to generate steam. After a while, we could hear these cooking sounds. It was a lot like cooking a turkey. In utter safety, I think, we could have opened the breechblock from time to time, and basted the shell. Eventually, though, the howitzer always got restless. And finally it would heave back on its recoil mechanism, and it would have to expectorate the shell. The shell would come floating out like the Goodyear blimp. If we had had a stepladder, we could have painted "Fuck Hitler" on the shell as it left the gun. Helicopters could have taken after it and shot it down.

Vonnegut's mother "wanted to make a fortune by writing for the slick magazines," and she "was a good writer . . . but she had no

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talent for the vulgarity the slick magazines required. Fortunately, I was loaded with vulgarity, so, when I grew up, I was able to make her dream come true." Vonnegut has taught creative-writing classes at various universities: Can creative writing be taught? asks the interviewer. "About the same way golf can be taught. A pro can point out obvious flaws in your swing. I did that well, I think, at the University of Iowa for two years. . . . I would tell the students to make their characters want something right away—even if it's only a glass of water. Characters paralyzed by the meaninglessness of modern life still have to drink water from time to time."

Vonnegut might have been thinking of Saul Bellow, whose books since *Herzog* have been turning not only drier and drier but more and more monumentally posthumous, culminating in that gravestone of a novel, *The Dean's December*, and who as early as this 1965 interview was talking ultimate truths, making use of "an opportunity, as he put it, to say some things which were important but which weren't being said": e.g. "A genuine radicalism, which truly challenges authority, we need desperately. But a radicalism of posture is easy and banal. Radical criticism requires knowledge, not posture, not slogans, not rant. . . ." And scads of other such apothegms ("I feel that art has something to do with the achievement of stillness in the midst of chaos"), which convert the interview into a parody of the in any case characteristic heavy breathing of his fiction. (Malamud is a more modest and less didactic novelist than Bellow, but Malamud's interview like Bellow's is full of wisdom: "Art, in essence, celebrates life and gives us our measure.") "Following each taping session [with Bellow]," says the headnote, "a typescript of his remarks was prepared. Bellow worked over these typed sheets extensively with pen and ink, taking as many as three separate meetings to do a complete revision. Then another typescript was made, and the process started over. . . ."

From the beginning of the series it has been emphasized that the *Paris Review* "interviews" were worked over after the fact, often revised down to the pickiest details and with considerable additions and rearrangements, by the subjects themselves. Heller and Vonnegut survive, and so do others; but Bellow's final product is typical of too many of the painstaking freshman essays here, and I doubt that the procedure was a good idea. Of course I haven't seen the first, second, and third drafts! In Charles Ruas's collection it's not the subject but the interviewer who has the afterthoughts ("In the editing of the transcript the interviewer cuts and splices . . ."); and—whether or not the method accounts for the result—Ruas's subjects, even those also interviewed in *Writers at Work*, come off in his book not so conspicuously flabbier than life, they do less huffing and puffing than Plimpton and Co.'s. Some survive both; Heller does (Ruas didn't interview Vonnegut or Bellow); Eudora Welty isn't prevented in either from being the same person she is in her fic-

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tion—a shrewd, sympathetic, observant, fine, fearless woman—but even Welty is more at home in the Ruas interview, has the elbow-room for instance to be more outspoken and more topical: "no one thought our new governor could ever be elected, except he was defeated before by a scoundrel, so when he ran again, for the third time, I think everybody thought, Well, look what we got when we didn't vote for him"; "Mississippi is very conservative. . . . Reagan carried the state because he came down there and he talked about 'We'll be having states' rights' and a whole lot of things like that. You know that was very wicked of him" (she's a lady, and speaks her mind plainly and precisely whatever the topic). Freer and snappier in her literary opinions too, as when, responding to the interviewer who has called "Why I Live at the P.O." a "comedy of hysteria" the "humor" of which derives from "pathological behavior," she courteously and instantly pulls the frayed Freudian rug right out from under him: "No, I tell you I don't think of them at all as being pathological stories. I know Katherine Anne Porter refers to the girl as a case of dementia praecox in the introduction [to *A Curtain of Green*]. She believed I thought so, but it's far from what I was doing in that story. I was trying to show how, in these tiny little places such as where they come from, the only entertainment people have is dramatizing the family situation, which they do fully knowing what they're doing. They're having a good time."

Mailer is in both collections, and sounds off—"pontificates," as one of his book titles puts it—like the same celebrity in both interviews, distant from each other though they are by more than twenty years; has the ill luck to survive both, because the public persona that took him over early is unaffected by time or the real world. Twenty years ago I heard Dwight Macdonald say about Mailer that "when you talk with him he seems a thoughtful and reasonable man, but as soon as he starts writing he stops making sense." And as soon as he starts being interviewed:

> The artist that I feel the greatest kinship with is Picasso. I almost wrote a book on Picasso once, years ago. I understand one thing about him very well, which is he wasn't interested in his own identity. He was interested in various attacks on the nature of reality, and he preferred to make each attack from a separate base so that he'd move his techniques and his psyche and his wit and assorted spiritual equipment over to the other side of the mountain. What I find most interesting in writing at this point is always making a new attack on the nature of reality. . . .

Both interviewers are charmed by him: according to the *Paris Review*, Mailer "conducts himself [during the interview] . . . as a kind of secular prince" (i.e. royal not pontifical?) and his "manners" are "exquisite." But Picasso he ain't. Gore Vidal, also doubly represent-

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ed, is another master of the instruments of publicity ("His reluctance to speak about himself or his work notwithstanding," notes Ruas without cracking a smile, "he is a favorite of the media and has been giving interviews all day"); he exhibits his world-weary condescension (a secular prince) impartially for both interviewers, discharging the frequent jets of malice that make him more readable than Mailer (whom he correctly designates "the patron saint of bad journalism": St. Norman the Exquisite). But if as Vidal would agree Mailer isn't Picasso, neither is Vidal: "every writer has a given theater in his head, a repertory company. Shakespeare has fifty characters, I have ten, Tennessee [Williams] has five, Hemingway has one, Beckett is busy trying to be none." (Chaucer has five thousand, of whom Vidal is busy trying to be just one—the Pardoner probably.)

As it happens, the last three—Welty, Mailer, and Vidal—all have things to say about Faulkner. In the *Paris Review* Vidal dismisses him as a run-of-the-mill Southern spellbinder: "I also come from a Southern family—back in Mississippi the Gores were friends of the Faulkners, all Snopeses together. In fact, when I read Faulkner I think of my grandfather's speeches in the Senate, of a floweriness that I have done my best to pluck from my own style—along with the weeds."[2] Mailer acknowledges the "great novelist" but with exceptional and indignant lucidity rejects the man:

> INTERVIEWER: Faulkner once said that nothing can injure a man's writing if he's a first-rate writer.
>
> MAILER: Faulkner said more asinine things than any other major American writer. I can't remember a single interesting remark Faulkner ever made.
>
> INTERVIEWER: He once called Henry James a "nice old lady."
>
> MAILER: Faulkner had a mean small Southern streak in him, and most of his pronunciamentos reflect that meanness. He's a great writer, but he's not at all interesting in most of his passing remarks.

Vidal relaxes somewhat a few years later, in the Ruas interview, where he's still hostile but more expansive, with anecdotes and quotations in which Faulkner is allowed to score a point or two but

[2] Faulkner doesn't make Vidal's honor roll of character-creators above because Vidal is on a quality kick and remains unmoved by such mere numbers as the "approximately 1,200 named persons found in 19 novels and 94 short stories and sketches [by Faulkner]. . . . About 175 of these persons are participants, or are mentioned, in more than one of Faulkner's fictional works" (Robert W. Kirk with Marvin Klotz, *Faulkner's People: A Complete Guide and Index to Characters in the Fiction of William Faulkner*, University of California Press, Berkeley, 1963, Introduction). These statistics do not include the numerous historical figures Faulkner incorporates into his fiction—Lee, Stuart, Jackson, etc.

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which are intended to demonstrate, once again, Vidal's equality of access to Faulkner's South as well as his warmth and sweetness and artistic and intellectual superiority to Faulkner himself:

> We only met three or four times, but when we got together, we would talk kin. We would review what had happened to Cousin Addie and what happened after the fire. Southerners make such good novelists; they have so many stories because they have so much family. I adapted "Barn Burning" for television and I saw him after that. He said [*mimicking voice*], "I myself did not see it, I do not have the television"—as he called it—"but members of the family in town told me it was very good." I said I was going out to Hollywood. I had a contract with MGM. He had one with Warner Brothers. He was a cold little man, very impersonal. He said [*mimicking voice*], "If I may give you some advice, never make the mistake of taking films seriously. Fitzgerald did, and I think that was a mistake. You do it, you get your money, and then you go and do your own work." What he would say about the *auteur* theory would be wildly funny, because he knew what actors and directors were.

Maybe by the statement Mailer took umbrage at ("nothing can injure a man's writing if he's a first-rate writer") what Faulkner meant was that character and judgment are indispensable qualities of a first-rate writer, and that anybody else is welcome to blame the injuries of circumstance. Mailer's list[3] begins with "Booze, pot, too much sex, too much failure in one's private life, too much attrition [? "attention"?], too much recognition . . ." and goes on and on complaining; Mailer beats his breast(s): Tiresias: once a nice old lady, now a blind prophet without honor but with multimillion-buck advances, who has not only foresuffered these injuries but sampled them all, poor guy, and where does Faulkner get off pretending they don't matter to anybody except the complainer? though in sooth Mailer's barrage has the muzzle velocity of Vonnegut's howitzer, and Faulkner is out of range anyhow. Moreover the little man whom Vidal quotes could as easily be reserved and shy or just discomforted by Vidal as "cold" and "impersonal"; and his well-known epic attach-

[3] An uncredited vulgarization, amounting to a reversal, of Hemingway in *Green Hills of Africa:*

> "Tell me first what are the things, the actual, concrete things that harm a writer?"
> I was tired of the conversation which was becoming an interview. So I would make it an interview and finish it. The necessity to put a thousand intangibles into a sentence, now, before lunch, was too bloody.
> "Politics, women, drink, money, ambition. And the lack of politics, women, drink, money and ambition," I said profoundly.

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ment to booze doesn't keep him from sounding, in Vidal's own testimony here, like a man with character and judgment.

At any rate, Welty is a minority of one:

> INTERVIEWER: Did you know Faulkner?
>
> WELTY: Slightly and over a long period of time, but not well. I liked him ever so much. We met at a dinner party in Oxford, just old friends of his and old friends of mine, which was the right way for it to happen, and it was just grand. We sang hymns, and we sang some old ballads—and the next day he invited me to go sailing. If we ever met in New York, we just talked about being in Oxford. *He* didn't bring up writing, and if he didn't, you know *I* wasn't going to bring it up! But when he was working in Hollywood, he once wrote me a two-line letter—this was long before we met—and told me he liked a little book of mine called *The Robber Bridegroom* and said would I let him know if he could ever do anything for me. It was on a little piece of notebook paper, written in that fine, neat, sort of unreadable hand, in pencil—and I've lost it.

"Did you feel at all influenced by his presence?" asks the interviewer, and in the course of replying Welty gets into print a warm, personal, generous anecdote about Mailer's and Vidal's cold, impersonal, mean little man:

> I don't honestly think so. It is hard to be sure about such things. I was naturally in the deepest awe and reverence of him. But that's no help in your own writing. Nobody can help you but yourself. So often I'm asked how I could have written a word with William Faulkner living in Mississippi, and this question amazes me. It was like living near a big mountain, something majestic—it made me happy to know it was there, all that work of his life. But it wasn't a helping or hindering presence. Its magnitude, all by itself, made it something remote in my own working life. When I thought of Faulkner it was when I *read.*
>
> On the other hand, he didn't seem remote to everybody in being our great writer. I know a story about him, though he never knew anybody knew of it, I'd bet. Mississippi is full of writers, and I heard this from the person it was told to. A lady had decided she'd write a novel and got along fine till she got to the love scene. "So," she told my friend, "I thought, there's William Faulkner, sitting right up there in Oxford. Why not send it to William Faulkner and ask him?" So she sent it to him, and time went by, and she didn't ever hear from him, and so she called him up. Because there he was. She said, "Mr. Faulkner, did you ever get that love scene I sent you?" He said yes, he had got it. And she said, "Well, what did you think of it?" And he said, "Well, honey,

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it's not the way I'd do it—but you go *right ahead.*" Now, wasn't that gentle of him?

Faulkner is one of the great and tender comic writers, as Vidal doesn't seem to have noticed (has he read *The Hamlet* or "Red Leaves"? since he makes a fuss about his vast reading and the shameful ignorance of the general reader). Faulkner was also a very intelligent man whether writing or even just talking, as Mailer doesn't seem to have noticed. Before cutting him down to size for the *Paris Review*, both ought to have had a look at what he had said in a *PR* interview that was already in print:

> I was living in New Orleans, doing whatever kind of work was necessary to earn a little money now and then. I met Sherwood Anderson. We would walk about the city in the afternoon and talk to people. In the evenings we would meet again and sit over a bottle or two while he talked and I listened. In the forenoon I would never see him. He was secluded, working. The next day we would repeat. I decided that if that was the life of a writer, then becoming a writer was the thing for me. So I began to write my first book. At once I found that writing was fun. I even forgot that I hadn't seen Mr. Anderson for three weeks until he walked in my door, the first time he ever came to see me, and said, "What's wrong? Are you mad at me?" I told him I was writing a book. He said, "My God," and walked out. When I finished the book–it was *Soldier's Pay*—I met Mrs. Anderson on the street. She asked how the book was going, and I said I'd finished it. She said, "Sherwood says that he will make a trade with you. If he doesn't have to read your manuscript he will tell his publisher to accept it." I said, "Done," and that's how I became a writer.

"My own experience has been that the tools I need for my trade are paper, tobacco, food, and a little whisky. INTERVIEWER: Bourbon, you mean? FAULKNER: No, I ain't that particular. Between scotch and nothing, I'll take scotch." "Watching a bird makes me feel good. You know that if I were reincarnated, I'd want to come back a buzzard. Nothing hates him or envies him or wants him or needs him. He is never bothered or in danger, and he can eat anything." Faulkner admires Dickens's Mrs. Gamp—"a cruel, ruthless woman, a drunkard, opportunist, unreliable, most of her character was bad, but at least it was character. . . . [She] coped with life, didn't ask any favors, never whined." (For a novelist who according to Mailer couldn't say an interesting thing outside his novels, this is a fair-to-middling description of one of the supreme and not very often considered more-than-merely-comic figures of the fictional imagination; but Mailer perhaps hasn't read *Martin Chuzzlewit.* He should. It's a terrific novel.) What about Joyce? "You should ap-

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proach Joyce's *Ulysses* as the illiterate Baptist preacher approaches the Old Testament: with faith." He tells a family story about "My Great-Grandfather Murry . . . a kind and gentle man, to us children anyway . . . neither especially pious nor stern either; he was simply a man of inflexible principles," who required everybody, adults and children alike, "to have a verse from the Bible ready and glib at tongue-tip when we gathered at the table for breakfast each morning . . . among the ham and steak and fried chicken and grits and sweet potatoes and two or three kinds of hot bread"; by the time you reached a certain age it had to be a new one, or else "you would suddenly find his eyes on you—very blue, very kind and gentle . . . and next morning you had a new verse." There's an uninterruptedly hilarious Hollywood anecdote of which one high moment has him plausibly trying to send the following telegram: "*MGM Studio, Culver City, California, William Faulkner.* The young lady operator said, 'Where is the message, Mr. Faulkner?' I said, 'That's it.' She said, 'The rule book says that I can't send it without a message, you have to say something.' So we went through her samples and selected I forget which one—one of the canned anniversary greeting messages. I sent that."

Vidal, asked about Hemingway, says, "I detest him" (which is a statement of feeling); and "Hemingway managed to convince everybody that before Hemingway everyone wrote like—who?—Gene Stratton Porter. But . . . Stephen Crane . . . did everything that Hemingway did and rather better" (which isn't a statement of fact). James Dickey on Frost: "I don't care much for Robert Frost, and have never been able to understand his reputation. . . . If it were thought that anything I wrote was influenced by Robert Frost, I would take that particular work of mine, shred it, and flush it down the toilet, hoping not to clog the pipes." Heady backchat. Truman Capote, prompted by the interviewer on the question of style, concedes that "there is such an animal as a nonstylist. Only they're not writers; they're typists." Frost, Faulkner, and Hemingway aren't typists or writers, they're authors: they have weight, breadth, substance, authority (not Bellow's notion of "authority" as that which "a genuine radicalism truly challenges"; what Bellow's talking about is nothing more than bureaucratic muscle). Vidal or Mailer or Dickey is the King of Lilliput valiantly drawing his pushpin sword against Gulliver, "the Man-Mountain." (VMD ought to have taken a lesson in proportion from Brahms, who had humility enough to realize what he was up against, hesitating to undertake a symphony because he couldn't conceive of matching Beethoven: "I hear the tramp of the giant behind me," he said.)

Frost's interviewer wonders whether, when Frost reads Stevens, he feels any—"Any affinity, you mean? Oh, you couldn't say that. No. Once he said to me, 'You write on subjects.' And I said, 'You write on bric-a-brac.' And when he sent me his next book he'd writ-

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ten 'S'more bric-a-brac' on it. Just took it good-naturedly. No, I had no affinity with him. We were friends." On "hinting": "With people you can trust you can talk in hints and suggestiveness. Families break up when people take hints you don't intend and miss hints you do intend." On poetry as "the marrow of wit": "There's got to be wit. And that's very, very much left out of a lot of this labored stuff." At the time of the interview he was eighty-six years old.

Many of the interviews came in the nick of time: "the great founders are dying off," Welty says sadly; many of the subjects are long dead. Near the end of a unique American life, Hemingway to the interviewer on the nature of American loose talk: "The fun of talk is to explore, but much of it and all that is irresponsible should not be written. Once written you have to stand by it. You may have said it to see whether you believed it or not." "INTERVIEWER: It has been said that a writer only deals with one or two ideas throughout his work. Would you say your work reflects one or two ideas? HEMINGWAY: Who said that? It sounds much too simple. The man who said it possibly *had* only one or two ideas." Why do you write? asks the interviewer; and, having given his reasons, Hemingway concludes, "But what about all the reasons that no one knows?" Pound, near the end of a glorious and blighted life, recalling Yeats: "He tried to learn fencing at forty-five, which was amusing. He would thrash around with the foils like a whale. He sometimes gave the impression of being even a worse idiot than I am." (Early in London, as Frost tells it, what "among other things" Pound did for Frost was "show me Bohemia. INTERVIEWER: Was there much Bohemia to see at that time? FROST: More than I had ever seen. I'd never had any. He'd take me to restaurants and things. Showed me jiu jitsu in a restaurant. Threw me over his head. INTERVIEWER: Did he do that? FROST: Wasn't ready for him at all. I was just as strong as he was. He said, 'I'll show you, I'll show you. Stand up.' So I stood up, gave him my hand. He grabbed my wrist, tipped over backwards and threw me over his head. INTERVIEWER: How did you like that? FROST: Oh, it was all right. Everybody in the restaurant stood up.") William Carlos Williams in his last year, after a series of strokes that had almost bereft him of the power of speech ("if I could only talk, to you for instance"), making his last pitch for "the American idiom. . . . One has to bow down, finally, either to the English or to the American." Céline, near the end of his journey to the end of the night, uncompromisingly and defiantly alone with a life of abominable and unnecessary choices: "experience is a dim lamp which lights only the one who bears it."

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MICHAEL GORRA

Fiction Chronicle

"LOOK AT HENDERSON DORES WALKING UP PARK AVENUE . . . carrying his sabers in a thin bag over his right shoulder," writes William Boyd at the start of his third and funniest novel.[1] His *sabers*? Are they just a normal response, post-Bernhard Goetz, to Manhattan street crime? Or part of the way everything about Henderson "proclaims his Englishness"? Both, of course, though Henderson doesn't know that yet. He thinks he carries sabers the way other people carry tennis rackets, because they're going to the gym; fencing is his way of responding to America's "continuous exhortation . . . to exercise." For at forty Henderson "isn't happy with the personality he's been provided with," and he's come to the States to see if he can find a new one. But it's hopeless. Looking at one of his colleagues at the auction house where he's an appraiser, he thinks:

> Here was the paradigm, the Platonic ideal. American man, late-twentieth-century model. Look how easily he wore his clothes, how at home he was in this smart restaurant. Consider the masterful aplomb with which he could initiate and terminate casual conversations. Listen to the rigidity and reasonableness of his opinions.

Didn't people once describe the English gentleman that way? But no more. To Boyd the contemporary Englishman finds himself cowed by the lunatic possibilities of America, as Henderson is by his Buddhist "zencing" instructor, by his colleagues, by his girlfriends, above all by his new assignment: to go down into rural Georgia to arrange the sale of a reclusive collector's batch of Impressionists.

It sounds easy. But the collector's Georgia cracker son has his own plans for the paintings, and threatens to kill Henderson because of them. And some gangsters want them too—which leads to a fine comic sequence near the end in which Henderson, back in New York, flees across Manhattan at dawn, dressed only in a cardboard box, toward the gym where he keeps an extra set of clothes, and where his "zencing" will at last serve some purpose. Given all that, a saber does seem a normal response to American life. But Boyd has a better one. The old collector teaches Henderson that

[1] STARS AND BARS, by *William Boyd*. William Morrow & Co. $16.95.

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"everyone wants to be happy, and everyone is going to die." And the only consolation man has for that is laughter, the sense of lewd comedy Henderson finds in one of the paintings he's come to examine, which shows how "Baubo made Demeter laugh by raising her skirts and exposing herself . . . when Demeter was in mourning for Persephone." Such laughter provides the "antidote of gloom and despair," and seems finally, to both Henderson and the reader, the only way to respond to the world Boyd describes.

Boyd does, of course, handle some parts of that world better than others. His stereotyped Georgians aren't so completely redeemed by laughter as his New Yorkers, and nothing he has to say about the surface details of Southern life quite matches his account of Henderson trying to eat something called "fillet of hake in lager and cranberry sauce" at a trendy Manhattan restaurant. But *Stars and Bars* is that rarest of things; a genuinely comic novel, not merely a funny one: a novel whose deepest concerns grow directly from the terms of comedy itself. In that, it is an advance upon Boyd's earlier books, which depended upon an application of comedy to politics (*A Good Man in Africa*) or to history (*An Ice-Cream War*). But this novel has its own public concerns as well, and in its recommendation of laughter as a consolation for the impotence Henderson feels before a world remade by America, *Stars and Bars* seems to me finally an account of the condition of England.

Ann Beattie's theme in *Love Always*[2] is similar to Boyd's—that, as her character Myra Devane thinks, "If you couldn't ignore things, making a joke seemed a feasible alternative. She couldn't have agreed more with the *Country Daze* philosophy," *Country Daze* being the Vermont-based, post-counter-culture humor magazine around which the novel turns. But the problem with *Country Daze*, as its editor tells Myra, is that people always overestimate "the influence and even importance of the magazine"; as Myra does herself in wondering if its readers are "just having a lighthearted laugh, or wasn't it possible that people actually felt alienated and angry." It's hard to miss some kind of personal application in this, as if Beattie is responding to the critics of her earlier stories about what Joseph Epstein calls the "hippoisie" by announcing that they were meant to be comic, that she does not take seriously the types of lives she has so precisely, if affectlessly, described. Much of the novel reads like a deliberate self-parody in which Beattie displaces her own fascination with the society's brand names onto her characters; like Peter, a gay gynecological surgeon who "had bought into Coleco pre-Cabbage Patch and sold pre-Adam. Currently he had been buying stock in a company that produced herbal vinegar. He felt that the vinegar market was always expanding." So long as the novel stays like this it's successful, Beattie's sustained attempt at turning her own prose

[2] LOVE ALWAYS, by *Ann Beattie*. Random House. $16.95.

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back in upon itself in order to achieve a systematic exposure of her characters' absurdity; an act of self-criticism, an exploration of the inadequacies of her own flat style. She embodies that style here in Nicole Nelson, a child soap-opera star too absorbed by her own position as one of society's disposable icons to feel "any real pull toward excess or passion or even the belief that something might be fun." But Beattie backs away from the implications of that spiritual anorexia, deciding that while her characters may be shallow, they are mortal and so worth taking seriously after all—even though the only one who dies has remained conveniently offstage for the whole novel, like Mrs. Churchill in *Emma*. "It was such a peculiar thing for us both to arrive at," *Country Daze*'s editor Hildon says at the end of the novel. "That everything was such a joke." And his mistress and star columnist Lucy replies, "You don't think that most of the time and neither do I. We never have." Beattie seems to assent to that; she doesn't have the courage of her own comedy, as Boyd does. But perhaps no writer whose sense of comedy is rooted in self-parody, which requires that one see oneself as a brand name, ever can, and *Love Always* remains finally a part of the world that in its best moments it wants to attack.

Beattie is often praised as a chronicler of contemporary manners. But her grasp of them is superficial, based upon an ersatz sense of social history as a mail-order catalog that never in itself quite becomes a comment on the world she describes, in a way that a comparison with a real master of American manners like Peter Taylor makes clear. *The Old Forest and Other Stories*[3] ought to be subtitled "New and Selected Stories," since most of the pieces in it are old ones Taylor omitted from his *Collected Stories* of 1969. No matter; it's a superb collection, and particularly so in its title novella, which is a new one, an account of a Southern gentleman's attempt to come to terms with feminism. In it Taylor's narrator, Nat, recalls a time fifty years ago when a "well-brought-up young man like me" would go out, until "the very eve" of his marriage to a girl in the "Memphis debutante set," with other girls, girls from what, without knowing what "the word . . . meant . . . we facetiously and somewhat arrogantly referred to as the Memphis demimonde." But such girls aren't like the New Orleans courtesans of *Absalom, Absalom*; they're simply young women without "family" who support themselves as bookkeepers and librarians. Nat's car breaks down when he's out riding with one of them a week before his wedding, and when it does, she flees, for no apparent reason, into the old forest of the title, and disappears. There follows a search for her in which Nat is joined by the city's mayor and a newspaper editor. And in describing the odd concern such important men have for the girl, Taylor provides this remarkable paragraph:

[3] THE OLD FOREST AND OTHER STORIES, by *Peter Taylor*. The Dial Press. $16.95.

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> They were a generation of American men who were perhaps the last to grow up in a world where women were absolutely subjected and under the absolute protection of men . . . [but] they agreed that this was the second or third generation there of women who had lived as independently, as freely as these girls did. I felt that what they said was in no sense as derogatory or critical as it would have been in the presence of their wives or daughters. They spoke almost affectionately and with a certain sadness of such girls . . . as the daughters of men who had abdicated their authority and responsibility as fathers, men who were not strangers or foreign to them, though they were perhaps of a different economic class . . . Southerners . . . destined to fail, even required to do so in a changing world. And so these men of position and power had to act as surrogate fathers during a transitional period. It was a sort of communal fatherhood they were acting out. Eventually, they seemed to say, fathers might not be required . . .

The girl's flight has in fact been part of an attempt at self-definition. And she is found only through the agency of Nat's fiancée Caroline, who tells Nat that in the constraints of her own debutante's world "The only power I had to save myself was to save you, and to save you by rescuing [her] . . . Because *I* had not set *my*self free the way those other girls have."

"The Old Forest" makes clear the nature of Taylor's great strength: his mastery not just of manners, of what Trilling calls a culture's "hum and buzz of implication," but of the history that creates that hum. The novella, like all Taylor's best stories, looks back to the Civil War and forward to the New South, for Taylor describes not just what people wear and eat and do, but how they came to act that way, and what it means for the culture as a whole. That comprehensive sense of history separates Taylor from most American writers, and has made him the chronicler of that crucial but little-known white Southern diaspora (his characteristic stance, in fact, is that of a man returning to, or recalling, the South he has long since left) to border cities like St. Louis, or even north to Detroit. Detroit, at any rate, provides the setting for the book's last piece, the one-act play "The Death of a Kinsman." There Taylor defines the whole sweep of Southern upper-middle class life by describing the strains the move north has placed upon the tradition-bound relationship of two women: the beautiful decorative young wife, and her husband's efficient maiden aunt, who must run the house to which the wife forms an ornament. In describing such lives without attacking them Taylor does in places seem to risk a genteel complacency. And yet he evades it, for to him those lives remain firmly rooted in a history that does not stand still, but creates that diaspora; and not only its title story but *The Old Forest* as a whole reveal the true gentleman's uncomplacent accession to change.

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Taylor has often been accused of being a writer's writer, by which one means, I suppose, someone not very prolific who is not much read by the general public—though this volume appears to have changed that estimate a bit. William Gaddis is another much-celebrated writer's writer, albeit of a very different kind, but I don't think *Carpenter's Gothic*[4] will do much to change the nature of his reputation. With some that reputation stands very high, high enough to make Gaddis the sort of novelist whose work one feels one ought to review by weighing the new work against one's assessment of the old; a tacit assumption of his *oeuvre*'s importance. Certainly Viking Penguin's re-release in paperback of Gaddis' two very long earlier novels, *The Recognitions* and *JR*, would provide an opportunity for that. And yet I wonder if that publishing tactic mightn't be counterproductive. It makes Gaddis not an author but an edifice, so that one feels one has to make a commitment not just to his new novel, but to swallow him whole, to study him—so that we all, in fact, begin to read like book reviewers. And of course that's just what Viking Penguin wants—if only it would work, as it did for William Kennedy. But Gaddis' earlier novels are simply too imposing for that, and I think they'll scare off readers who might pick up and, yes, enjoy *Carpenter's Gothic*—as, without the excuse of this chronicle, they would have scared off me. Even so, I'm shy of the commitment Gaddis represents, or would be if doing a fiction chronicle didn't also transform me into a more-than-ordinarily-conscience-free common reader. And so I've read *Carpenter's Gothic* not as the next stage in the development of the author of *The Recognitions*, but in order to see if he's someone I enjoy enough to want to take the time some year to read that earlier work.

The answer, I'm afraid, is a qualified no. The sheer size of *The Recognitions* drew comparisons with Joyce and Proust, but in this novel Gaddis seems to me more like an American version of Henry Green, in the way he blends bursts of extraordinarily sensuous descriptive prose with equally masterful passages of mad dialogue; like Green, too, in the way that the novel attempts to present a strictly phenomenological report of experience without assigning a meaning to it. Liz Booth lives in a house along the Hudson with her husband, Paul. She's an heiress whose estate is tied up in litigation; he's an opportunist trying to make a go as a publicist. Here's Paul:

> —Liz it was an hour, one solid God damn hour I couldn't reach you nobody could, that whole list I gave you? These calls I've been waiting for? State Department calling about this spade with his prisons and chicken factories did they call? And these pigs? Drug company bringing in these nutritionists for a look at these pigs did they call? . . . You're on the phone for an hour with Edie,

[4] CARPENTER'S GOTHIC, by *William Gaddis*. Elisabeth Sifton Books—Viking. $16.95.

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> somebody calls they get a busy . . . Liz I'm trying to get something going here, line up these clients tell them to check with my home office and you're talking to Edie?

Through such speeches *Carpenter's Gothic*, as Frank Kermode writes of Henry Green, "invites structuration [but] questions the notion of definitive structures." For they are like the carpenter's Gothic of the novel's title, houses "built to be seen from outside," whose surfaces have a powerful and persuasive effect, even though their interior architecture is twisted and warped. But Gaddis doesn't take us behind the dialogue to unveil his characters' psychology, doesn't reveal how much they believe of what they say, or provide much direct indication of how we're supposed to take it. Their speeches remain unbound by the structurations of truth or judgement, bound instead only to the narrative itself, so that we don't so much "read about" Gaddis' characters in any traditional way as eavesdrop upon them, upon a conversation for which we've no context. Yet in its scrupulous denial of information we'd normally want to have Gaddis' method is so rigorous that his characters themselves seem oddly unimportant to some quite other artistic transaction enacted between author and reader.

Where does truth lie? the novel punningly seems to ask, and offers no answers. Yet while Gaddis fills the novel with carefully-planned confusions and *cul-de-sacs*, so that reading it does resemble the act of exploring one of those houses, with their stairways that lead nowhere and doors that open onto blank walls, it seems to me that the book is like a piece of carpenter's Gothic in a sense other than that he intends. Page by page it's brilliant. I particulary admire the way Gaddis uses both Paul and McCandless, the geologist from whom the Booths have rented their house, uses their rantings to bring the world of ideas into that house on the Hudson, the world of political debate about imperialism, or the role of religion in democratic life—imprisoning structures that Gaddis attempts to explode. But the novel seems finally less than the sum of its parts, succumbs to the nullity it tries to disclose, as if there's something missing in Gaddis' resistance to any other than a formalist structuration. I want more than an exquisitely made object to deconstruct and to me *Carpenter's Gothic* most resembles that architectural style in being a less interesting, less sustaining, less liveable aesthetic experience than at first it appears. I'm uneasy with that evaluation, and recognize the bias that lies behind it. And so perhaps I'll have to test it, willy-nilly, against *The Recognitions* after all.

Gaddis is a writer's writer; Philip Roth simply writes about writers. I'm uneasy with that too. Roth's theme in the novels now collected in an omnibus with the punning title of *Zuckerman Bound*,[5]

[5] ZUCKERMAN BOUND: A TRILOGY AND EPILOGUE, by *Philip Roth*. Farrar, Straus & Giroux. $22.50; $9.95.

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and augmented by a novella-length epilogue, "The Prague Orgy," is the way his protagonist Nathan Zuckerman is bound to, limited by, his own experience. But if that's true for Roth as well it doesn't mean that he has to write about writers himself, any more than in writing his own psychic autobiography in *Great Expectations* Dickens had to make Pip a novelist just because he himself was. That's an old criticism (I made it myself in reviewing the trilogy's third volume, *The Anatomy Lesson*, in these pages two years ago) but still a valid one. And yet maybe it's time simply to accept this as a given of Roth's work, as we accept Dickens' sentimentality, or James's fuzziness about his characters' finances. For Zuckerman remains most desperately bound not to his life as a writer, or even to his sexual life as a man (to steal one of Roth's other titles), but to his life as a Jew. After recovering from the backache that plagued him in *The Anatomy Lesson*, Zuckerman returns to New York, and begins to write again. There, as he reports in the diary of which "The Prague Orgy" consists, a Czech emigré tells Zuckerman of a pre-Holocaust manuscript, written in "the Yiddish of Flaubert," by his long-dead father, that he's had to leave in Czechoslovakia with his embittered ex-wife Olga. Will Zuckerman retrieve it? He may, the emigré warns him, have to sleep with Olga to get it, but Zuckerman shouldn't mind that, she has "the best legs in Prague."

And so it's off to the orgy. But that isn't sex so much as Prague itself, Kafka's city of hollow lugubrious laughter, a city caught between depression and frenzy, in which Olga can threaten to commit suicide by stealing a Russian tank and shooting herself with it; or in which another character, Bolotka, can recall the time he spied on himself to help out the friend who was supposed to keep watch on him. To the Czechs, Zuckerman thinks, such jokes, such stories "aren't simply stories; it's what they have instead of life. Here they have become their stories, in lieu of being permitted to be anything else. Storytelling is the form their resistance has taken against the coercion of the powers-that-be." And through that coercion, Zuckerman finds, totalitarianism has written the Jewish experience across a dozen countries. For Prague itself seems the city that, as a child collecting money for the Jewish National Fund, he had

> . . . imagined the Jews would buy when they had accumulated enough money for a homeland . . . the overpowering oldness of the homes, the centuries of deterioration that had made the property so cheap, the leaky pipes and moldy walls and rotting timbers and smoking stoves and simmering cabbages souring the air of the semidark stairwells . . . [and] the stores, all the telling and listening to be done, their infinite interest in their own existence, the fascination with their alarming plight . . . "And this is what suffering does!" . . . That such things can happen—there's the moral of the stories—that such things happen to me, to him, to her, to you, to us. That is the national anthem of the Jewish

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> homeland. By all rights, when you hear someone there begin telling a story . . . you ought to stand and put your hand to your heart.

But you don't, or don't only do that. You laugh too, however much it hurts, as we have laughed at Singer's "Gimpel the Fool," as we now laugh at the gentile Kundera's *The Book of Laughter and Forgetting*—as we laugh at "The Prague Orgy." The novella provides both an *apologia* for the comic energy behind Roth's work, and a sense of perspective upon Zuckerman's problems that allows him to see himself, as we have all along, as a "shallow, sentimental, American idiot Jew." But that self-knowledge is as unpredictably double-edged as the Jewish sensibility itself, as the ever-changing tension between the laughter and the tears that come from the knowledge "that such things can happen." "Zuckerman the Zionist agent," says a customs official, as Zuckerman leaves Czechoslovakia, without the stories for which he has come. And while one winces at the prejudice, it also makes Zuckerman's self-identification into an oddly jaunty badge of pride, like a black teenager calling himself "nigger." For all the standard criticisms of Roth's work that one can make, will make, a set of crucial questions remains. Is there any other contemporary American novelist with his magnificent effrontery, who is simultaneously so maddening and so entertaining, so provocative in the best sense of the word? And what other novelist can be as funny as Roth, or can find in that comedy such sadness, such depths of moral seriousness as his apostrophe to Prague discloses? The deepest concerns of "The Prague Orgy," like those of *Stars and Bars*, grow directly from the terms of its own comedy. But Boyd has to go pretty far afield to find Baubo and Demeter. Roth's terms come straight from the heart of Jewish history, straight from the heart of a culture, of a sensibility, that this century has laid upon us all. That, it seems to me, is the difference between good fiction and great fiction.

Roth has in recent years also served as General Editor of Penguin's fine "Writers from the Other Europe" series, a series that, like "The Prague Orgy" itself, provides a reminder of the way in which not just American writers but the American reading taste remains insulated from what happens in the rest of the world. And yet the attempt to combat one's own parochialism isn't always an easy one. Take, for example, the Chilean Isabel Allende's *The House of the Spirits*,[6] which begins:

> *Barrabas came to us by sea*, the child Clara wrote in her delicate calligraphy. She was already in the habit of writing down important matters, and afterward, when she was mute, she also record-

[6] THE HOUSE OF THE SPIRITS, by *Isabel Allende*. Translated by Magda Bogin. Alfred A. Knopf. $17.95.

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> ed trivialities, never suspecting that fifty years later I would use her notebooks to reclaim the past and overcome terrors of my own.

One doesn't have to have read many Latin American novels to know where one has seen this before. "Many years later, as he faced the firing squad, Colonel Aureliano Buendia . . ."—the first sentence of Garcia Marquez' *One Hundred Years of Solitude*. But are such cryptic annunciations of the future, such attempts to make time itself not linear but synchronous, characteristic of the Latin American literary imagination as a whole? Is Allende just working within a tradition, or does she owe some more specific debt to Garcia Marquez? For surely those two questions aren't the same.

Wherever it comes from, Allende's own use of such foreshadowing defeats suspense instead of heightening it. In reading one doesn't much care how the things she announces come to pass (as one does care about how Colonel Aureliano Buendia came to face that firing squad)—doesn't care because Allende never quite manages to make time itself a character in the novel. *One Hundred Years of Solitude* ends with the town of Macondo's eruption into history; linearity's defeat of synchroneity. But Allende tries to have it both ways from the start, for *The House of the Spirits* is in part a *roman à clef* about recent Chilean history, as seen through the life of the Trueba family. As an old man Esteban Trueba, rapist and Senator, whose first-person narration Allende alternates with her own third person exposition of the family's life, says that he believed "military intervention [i.e. Pinochet] was a necessary step for the return to a healthy democracy," and so supports the overthrow of his nameless country's nameless President (i.e. the author's uncle Salvador Allende). Trueba's democracy has always included the landlord's right to tell his peasants, at gunpoint, for whom to vote, but he nevertheless repents his early support for the dictatorship, claiming that "No one knew then that things were going to turn out the way they have." And his narrative has all the book's best pages, provides an exploration of the inner landscape of a monster who can't conceive of himself as monstrous, of a voice that, in standing for Latin America's once and future *machismo*, has the most to tell us about the novel's political questions. But in alternating that voice with chapters written in what seems a conventional "magic realism" (or even, as in the novel's first pages, allowing that quality to infiltrate Trueba's own voice), Allende destroys the sense of tragedy that her use of history creates, as that history in turn destroys whatever "magic" she has to offer.

In consequence the novel seems diffuse, far longer than its 368 pages—and Allende's style doesn't help either. I don't read Spanish, but surely one can't blame the translator, Magda Bogin, for Allende's prosily unHomeric reliance upon formulaic epithets. A dozen-odd references to Clara's "notebooks that bore witness to life"?

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That's enough to make me suspect that the fault for sentences such as "Esteban went to the brothel as it was the only source of entertainment in town, but he was not a man for whores," lies with Allende herself.

Marguerite Duras gives her narrative in *The Lover*[7] a fragmentary structure, telling her story in chunks of prose usually no more than a page in length. Yet this chronicle of a French teenager's affair with a Chinese man in French Indochina fifty years ago has that great urge forward that Allende's novel lacks, the sense of a balanced form that makes one want to know not what happens next (for we're told from the start that the affair ended) but *how* it happens. *The Lover* isn't about love so much as sex—or rather about the difference between love and sex, love and desire. But sex for Duras isn't an end in itself. Her interest lies instead in the possibilities for self-creation that sex affords. To her sexual intimacy serves primarily as a Lawrencian reminder of the otherness of other people, the otherness from which one's own individuality grows. Duras' narrator craves that, she seeks it out—she is the seducer, not the older man, "It depended on her alone." And her lover's race is but one more way of establishing her individuality, for it makes him forbidden, and so even more other. In this *The Lover* seems reminiscent of the other work by which I know Duras, her script for the Alain Resnais film *Hiroshima Mon Amour*, in which a French woman recalls, during a brief encounter with a Japanese man, her wartime affair with a German soldier, for which she was ostracized and yet which she cherishes. That punishment points up the dangers of this narrator's attempt at self-creation. For though she craves it, it also ravages her, so that she has "a face laid waste" not by age but experience, a face that at fifteen "foretold the one I acquired through drink in middle age"—as if she had to begin to drink to justify that face.

Duras' translator, Barbara Bray, has preserved the aphoristic elegance of the French. This translation stands as a beautiful work of English prose:

> On the sidewalk the crowd, going in all directions, slow or fast, forcing its way, mangy as stray dogs, blind as beggars, a Chinese crowd, I can still see it now in pictures of present prosperity, in the way they go along together without any sign of impatience, in the way they are alone in a crowd, without happiness, it seems, without sadness, without curiosity, going along without seeming to, without meaning to, just going this way rather than that, alone and in the crowd, never alone even by themselves, always alone even in the crowd.

[7] THE LOVER, by *Marguerite Duras*. Translated by Barbara Bray. Pantheon. $11.95.

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Such prose makes *The Lover* seem not so much a novel as a meditation, a collection of *pensées*, in which despite this volume's brevity (117 pp.) Duras can find room for observations on politics and the private life, colonialism and exile, literature and history. *The Lover* reads quickly. But I think it will bear a slow re-reading, and I plan to give it one soon.

Marguerite Yourcenar's Orient is not Duras', but the two writers nevertheless share something more than first names and age and language, for they both provide a sense of a slow care taken over their prose that makes their work not simple, but clear. Yourcenar's new book[8] (or, since these stories date from the 1930s, her newly translated one) is Oriental rather than of the Orient, a matter of attitude more than of place, even though her settings include China, India, and Japan. These are Oriental tales as Isak Dinesen's are Gothic tales. They exploit the exotic for the freedom it offers from the requirements of realism, a freedom that allows both writers an open exploration of the theme that realism can only approach circuitously, the relationship of life to art. This is particularly true of the collection's first story, "How Wang-Fo was Saved," a retelling of the old legend about the Chinese painter who loved "the images of things and not the things themselves"—so that, when condemned to death by an Emperor whom his art had made dissatisfied with life, Wang-Fo escapes by simply walking into the world of his last painting. Other stories provide variations upon classics of Western literature, or rather upon the tales behind those classics. "Kali Beheaded" takes up a legend that both Goethe and Mann have used, and "The Man who Loved the Nereids," puts "La Belle Dame Sans Merci" into a Greek setting, in a way that allows Yourcenar to explore the transition from the pagan to the Christian world. One thinks of lacquerwork and cloisonné—and yet however appropriate such "Oriental" comparisons are, they do Yourcenar less than justice, for they ignore the very real possibilities for narrative art that her work discloses. What better way to "make it new," in Pound's phrase, than through such imitations of classical works, or through an imaginative reconstruction of history, like Yourcenar's own *Memoirs of Hadrian*? For the original's very power, as Pound well knew, can afford an extraordinarily rich medium through which to explore the possibilities of one's own language.

R. K. Narayan has done much the same thing in producing English versions of classical Indian mythology. His new book,[9] though, is a selection of twenty-eight stories, most of them no more than six pages long, from the hundreds he has written throughout his ca-

[8] ORIENTAL TALES, by *Marguerite Yourcenar*. Translated by Alberto Manguel in collaboration with the author. Farrar, Straus & Giroux. $12.95.

[9] UNDER THE BANYAN TREE AND OTHER STORIES, by *R.K. Narayan*. Viking. $16.95.

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reer. American writers tend to shun the anecdotal in fiction, believing that it falsifies what Grace Paley calls "the open destiny of life." But Narayan depends upon it: the man who, in the famous "A Horse and Two Goats," sells a village monument to an American tourist, believing the American only wants to buy his two mangy goats; another who gets in trouble for trying to follow his horoscope; the story which "The Talkative Man," a recurrent figure in Narayan's work, tells about the time his shop assistant cheated him. And none of them seem falsified, and none of them depend upon an O. Henryish ending. What they do depend upon, I think, is a different sense of the relationship of character to event than the one we're used to. In most Western fiction, character shapes event, so that if a writer relies upon anecdote, it tends to grow out of character—think of Faulkner's stories about Flem Snopes, which could only be about Flem, and not Colonel Sartoris. But that sense of the relationship of character to event depends upon a sense of individual autonomy, at least as a value to be defended, that seems alien to everything in Indian life, and in Narayan it's the other way around. Events create character, so that his stories seem as if they could happen to anyone. For they could. The Talkative Man isn't cheated by his employee because of the type of man he is; rather that type, his talkativeness in particular, is contained within, determined by, the things that happen to him. Narayan's most characteristic stories, accordingly, provide a naturalistic description of the way in which a character meets an accident at the hands of a more or less impersonal force—occasionally a boss, more often poverty or urban life; almost never a confrontation with an individual human being as such. And he describes those accidents with a dispassionate objectivity that comes, I think, from the English language itself. It is as if the language interposes itself between the Indian writer and the Indian life he describes, distances him from it, so that his poor characters in particular are never sentimentalized in either sense of the word: never made into objects of pity, never condescended to, though often laughed at.

Narayan's stories aren't achievements on the scale of his novels. They're best taken one or two at a time, for when read half a dozen or more at a sitting, as their length makes possible, they can begin to seem repetitive—constrained by their brevity, their inability to let one anecdote develop into another, in a way that betrays their origin in the English–language newspaper *The Hindu*. But still—what newspaper pieces! *Under the Banyan Tree* links Narayan with writers like Maupassant or Chekhov, or his contemporary I.B. Singer, who have found in newspaper publication both honor and audience. Would that we had more writers who could do so, and more newspapers that would let them!

The young Anglo-Chinese novelist Timothy Mo's second book[10]

[10] SOUR SWEET, by *Timothy Mo*. Vintage Aventura. $8.95 p.

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has some of the same objectivity as Narayan's, and I think for the same reason. But the real comparison is with V.S. Naipaul—not the jaundiced traveller, but the novelist who has lamented that "experimentation, not aimed at the real difficulties" has robbed the novel of conviction, so that "the world we inhabit, which is always new, goes by unexamined, made ordinary by the camera, unmeditated on"; the Naipaul who in the great comic realism of his early novels of Trinidadian life revealed a piece of that world we had not seen before. Mo's achievement in the Hawthornden-prizewinning *Sour Sweet* is of a similar order: not the creation, like Gaddis, of his own world, but of a world that he makes a part of everyone's. In its chronicle of the lives of Chinese immigrants in London in the early 1960s, *Sour Sweet* extends the range of material with which the novel as a genre can deal. Mo has, of course, been helped in having by birth access to a realm of experience with which the English novel has not before dealt. And yet to make accessible to others the world one knows, to do it so completely that the reader accepts the characters' point of view and begins to see London as an alien place—that is a great achievement.

Yet *Sour Sweet* makes no attempt to compete with Maxine Hong Kingston's accounts of the Chinese interior landscape, concentrating instead on its characters' lives in the world, and above all on their work. The novel tells two stories in alternating chapters. The first is that of the Chen family, who run a take-out counter selling food that "bore no resemblance at all to Chinese cuisine . . . 'Sweet and sour pork' was their staple . . . batter musket balls encasing a tiny core of meat, laced with a scarlet sauce that had an interesting effect on the urine of the consumer the next day." The second story describes the operations of the London branch of Family Hung, a Chinese secret society that, from its start centuries ago as a religious fraternity built around the martial arts, has grown into a criminal confederation, linking Hong Kong to Chinatowns around the world. The two narratives touch only twice: once when Chen goes to the Hung for money to pay his sick father's hospital bills in Hong Kong; once again at the end of the novel when the time comes, as one knows it must, for him to discharge that debt. Yet if Chen's final meeting with the Hung does have a certain inevitability about it, it seems the inevitability of life itself, and not that of a thriller; hedged by accidents and contingencies, seemingly determined not by the requirements of literary form, not even by those of the turn-of-the-century naturalism that *Sour Sweet* resembles, but simply by the fact of being Chinese in a particular place at a particular time. I suppose an American analogy would be a novel about an Italian family trying to avoid the Mafia, but we don't have that novel, have only shelves of formula fiction and an unironic *Godfather*. Perhaps the American novel, with its emphasis on self-creation, is essentially unsuited for dealing with immigrants, with what ought to be the great American story. For immigration, as Mo sug-

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gests, reminds one not so much of the person one might become, as of the person one already inescapably is. *Sour Sweet* shows, at any rate, that those least able to adapt to English life are those infected by the spirit of what, along with chopsticks, most represents China to the West—the martial arts. Lily Chen's father, disappointed that he had no son, taught her Chinese boxing when she was a girl. And Ma Lurk Hing is the secret society's enforcer and leader, a fighter who believes guns beneath a serious warrior's dignity. Both remain intransigent before English life, and both suffer because of it. Lily's insistence that Chen continue to send his parents money makes the Hung able to find him in an age when they can trace every letter that passes between Hong Kong and London; and Mo suggests she'll lose her son Man Kee as well, not to the Hung, but to English life itself. Ma doesn't recognize that street-fighting must be a last resort in the West, that one should do business with rivals rather than kill them. And his inflexibility leads to his betrayal, and his crippling by a shot-gun blast.

I've said that *Sour Sweet* has none of the thriller formula about it—which doesn't mean that it's not as exciting to read as a thriller, and in the same way. Here Mo describes an assault the Hung make upon another society:

> Jackie Fung now had a sword. He came into the open and a man slashed at him with a cleaver. He parried, again slightly awkwardly. Then in a short, hopping action he brought his rear right heel to the left heel and, having made the necessary ground with the half-step, simultaneously high-kicked and punched to the face with the left side as smoothly and easily as a pair of scissors opening. The crack of the clean headshots cut over all the other sounds in the room. He stepped over the body and stabbed in the back a man who had an axe poised at the top of its swing.

Or no, not exciting like a thriller, but sickening, and deliberately so, this methodical prose whose appalling beauty and precision is like that of Chinese boxing itself, a prose whose bloodless objectivity lets one see such actions for the bloody violence they actually are. And yet the novel is filled with moments of odd incidental beauty as well, with the pains and above all the comedy of ordinary life in an alien land: Chen trying to learn to drive, and failing; Lily, who does learn, realizing that you can bribe your way out of a traffic ticket in London, as you could out of almost anything in Hong Kong; Man Kee puzzled and upset when his teacher at school accuses him of fighting "dirty," when all he has done is use some of the kicks his mother has taught him. Naipaul says the camera has made the world ordinary. And yet the film critic Siegfried Kracauer speaks of film's achievement as the revelation—the redemption—of the reality that passes unnoticed before our eyes. The realistic novel at its best has always offered that redemption as well. With *Sour Sweet*, Timothy Mo joins the company of those who have enabled it to do so.

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WILLIAM H. PRITCHARD

Epistolary Styles

MORE THAN ONE REVIEWER OF RANDALL JARRELL'S recently-published correspondence hastened to assure us that Jarrell did not write "great letters," and since I had read them through with pretty continuous interest and frequent delight, I asked myself who the great literary letter-writers in English were, over the past century or two. I began by eliminating myself from consideration, although when younger more than one person told me I was a Great Letter Writer, and one girl from Skidmore suggested that really I should write for *The New Yorker*. But it never worked out, and now I feel that hardly ever do I write a Great Letter. Excepting me, then, there was Keats for one, who combined vividness of perception, range of tone, with rich generalizations about poetry and life. And then . . . ? Byron—yes, surely Byron. Henry James? Robert Frost? I can remember trying to convince myself that D. H. Lawrence belonged to the great-letters crowd, but would now willingly give his place to Evelyn Waugh. How about dark horses like Hart Crane or Wyndham Lewis? After spending a good many hours reading liberally, though not down to the last comma, from the six handsomely produced and splendidly edited volumes to be considered here, I came out feeling that, like Wallace Stevens' notion of a poem, a great letter writer must resist the intelligence almost successfully. He or she must, here and there and finally, be too much for us, must overwhelm us—as do Keats and Byron—with the spectacle of superhuman energies and irrepressible fancies. How do these modern writers measure up to this standard?[1]

As would be expected, Joseph Conrad does not overwhelm us, at least in these "early" letters covering his apprenticeship as a writer up through the publication, in 1897, of *The Nigger of the "Narcissus"*, at which point he seems to have arrived. Many of the letters are to

[1] THE COLLECTED LETTERS OF JOSEPH CONRAD: Volume I 1861–1897, ed. by *Frederick R. Karl* and *Lawrence Davies*. Cambridge University Press. $39.50. THE COLLECTED LETTERS OF THOMAS HARDY: Volume Five 1914–1919, ed. by *Richard Little Purdy* and *Michael Millgate*. Clarendon Press, Oxford. $37.00. SELECTED LETTERS OF E.M. FORSTER: Volume II 1921–1970, ed. by *Mary Lago* and *P. N. Furbank*. Harvard University Press. $20.00. POUND/LEWIS: The Letters of Ezra Pound and Wyndham Lewis, ed. by *Timothy Materer*. New Directions. $37.50. THE LETTERS OF D.H. LAWRENCE: Volume III 1916–1921, ed. by *James T. Boulton* and *Andrew Robertson*. Cambridge University Press. $49.50. BERNARD SHAW: Collected Letters 1911–1925, ed. by *Dan H. Laurence*, Viking Press, $45.00.

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his aunt, Marguerita Poradowska, and are filled with the grand style pessimism and cosmic hopelessness which early on became Uncle Joe's stock and trade. "Life rolls on in bitter waves, like the gloomy and brutal ocean under a sky covered with mournful clouds, and there are some days when to the poor souls embarked on the desperate voyage it seems that not a ray of sun has ever been able to penetrate that sad veil." One loves that sort of thing. A letter to his aunt written from Africa announces that "Everything here is repellent to me. Men and things, but men above all. And [he adds, for fairness sake] I am repellent to them also." Upon receiving the proofs of his first novel, *Almayer's Folly*, he does this characteristically Uncle Joe bit of depreciation: "I was horrified: absolutely horrified by the thing in print, looking so stupid—worse—senseless." In the abjectness of his apologies he will not be outdone by Henry James: "I cover my head with ashes. I rend my outer garment, I take off my shoes—for two pins I would put a rope around my neck—to approach the tribunal of your mercy." The most interesting, least melodramatic and histrionic letters in the volume are written to his friend and encourager, Edward Garnett, and there is an especially attractive one to the unsigned reviewer of *An Outcast of the Islands*, who turned out to be H. G. Wells. The same book was sent to James with a "letter" inscribed on its flyleaf in Conrad's most vasty style: "I address you from across a vast space invoking the name of that one of Your children You love the most." There are many other capital Y's as The Master is properly supplicated. Conrad's letters will run for seven further volumes; this book is so beautiful that it's a pleasure to turn pages even when the content in front of you fails to grip.

The same goes double for Clarendon Press's volume five of Hardy's collected letters (there are two more to go, one less than Conrad's will eventually run). I haven't yet read the previous volumes of Hardy's correspondence but expected some pretty thin gruel would be dished out. In that I wasn't disappointed, yet there is a real pleasure in watching the way Hardy *doesn't* open up to this or that correspondent. A perfect example of battening down the hatches even before they've been opened is this one to an American journalist who sent Mr. Hardy an article he'd written (the response may be quoted in full): "Dear Mr De Casseres: I have read with interest your articles in this month's *International Review* and also some previous articles that you have sent. I am of course unable to criticize the former, and the others do not require remark." (Why not? we wonder.) Then Hardy exits quickly with "I am glad to hear that your hands are full of work, since your mind is, no doubt, full of ideas. Wishing you success believe me." It is that "no doubt" which puts the perfect chill on matters. When in February of 1914 Hardy married his second wife, Florence Dugdale, he assured Frederick Harrison (who had written a note of congratulation) that for him

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and his bride the event was of a "sober color enough," and "that the union of two rather melancholy temperaments may result in cheerfulness, as the junction of two negatives forms a positive, is our modest hope." After such a beginning, one feels things can't help getting a bit better. As with his poetry, Hardy's exploitation of the negative is everywhere evident and oddly satisfying. The only person to whom he goes on for a bit and opens up to slightly—behaves like a "normal" letter writer, in other words—is Florence Henniker (she who "did not come" in "A Broken Appointment"). His addresses to her are a combination of grace and warmth, always communicated through the most polite of surfaces.

One learns from these letters almost nothing about Hardy's art, except that he insisted his poetry was "essential" and his novels accidental. I was interested to find that he liked Walter Scott "the wrong way," preferring his poetry to his prose, and *Kenilworth* to his "Scotch novels." Should we take the tip and go read *Kenilworth*? His best remark about poetry occurs in a letter he never sent, addressed "To an Unidentified Correspondent" and probably (the editor suggests) written as a polemical exercise. In it Hardy advises the fledgling poet to be careful about rhythms and rhymes, the "mechanical" part of verse, since reviewers and other readers "do not know that dissonances, and other irregularities can be produced advisedly, as art, and worked as to give more charm than strict conformities, to the mind and ear of those trained and steeped in poetry." Ignorant reviewers "assume that a poet who commits one of those irregularities does so because of his ignorance, and the inferiority of his ear to that of the critic himself. *Ars est celare artem* they have never heard of or forgot it." Surely this is spoken out of personal experience, and with some passion.

E. M. Forster caught, wonderfully, the aspect of self-parody in Hardy's conversation and letters when in July 1922 he described a "simple, almost dull tea at the Hardys" and revealed that though he had been invited to lunch the next day and to a performance of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, little was to be expected from either, given the fact of the Hardys' brand-new cook and the local nature of the Shakespearean performance. But the finest moment at tea seems to have occurred when Hardy showed Forster the graves where his pets were buried:

> Such a dolorous muddle. "This is Snowbell—she was run over by a train . . . this is Pella, the same thing happened to her . . . this is Kitkin, she was cut clean in two, clean in two— —" "How is it that so many of your cats have been run over, Mr. Hardy? Is the railway near?"—"Not at all near, not at all near— —I don't know how it is. But of course we have only buried here those pets whose bodies were recovered. Many were never seen again."

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Forster confesses to his mother that "I could scarcely keep grave—it was so like a caricature of his own novels or poems." The best moments in this selection of letters (the two volumes contain only 446 from a total of 15,000) are ones in which Forster the comic writer, the less-than-fierce satirist, does up a scene like one at Lady Ottoline Morrell's Garsington where "the dreaded Wyndham Lewis" puts in an appearance. He, along with the painter Mark Gertler, Forster writes, "were frightened of, and frightened the high-born undergraduates, who motored out, gaping and undulating, from Oxford." This is first-rate, as is his picture of "Poor Lady O." who "drifts about wondering what will happen, wishes she could *understand* people, wishes they were more simple etc., clad the meantime herself in elaborate floating dresses of all the colours of the rainbow." Forster admits he has quite enjoyed himself; the enjoyment is apparent in his perfectly tuned prose about the event.

After *A Passage to India* was published in 1924 and Forster receded from novels to belles–lettres, his letters seem correspondingly dilute, scattered, and one would rather be reading P. N. Furbank's biography, or some unwritten "Life and Letters" volume with a real connecting commentary from letter to letter. Although edited within an inch of their lives—four or five footnotes per letter, followed by seventy packed pages of index and bibliography—they don't cumulatively add up to all that much. A very astute, annoyed one to Lowes Dickinson in 1922 is more telling about "the tiresomeness and conventionalities of fiction-form" than anything which succeeds it. In old age, as one looks for him to provide the occasional pearl of wisdom, the following Atheist's Consolation is as good as anything I found: "As soon as one realises that the universe is neither for us or against us one feels steadier. Hardy weakened himself by supposing it was hostile, and set traps." Unfairly or not, I was reminded of Katherine Mansfield's nasty crack in her diary about how Forster "never gets any further than warming the teapot. He's a rare fine hand at that. Feel this teapot. Is it not beautifully warm? Yes, but there ain't going to be no tea."[2] After these letters, best to go back and reread *A Passage to India*.

There's tea a-plenty, or is it piss and vinegar, in Timothy Materer's extremely artful combining of the to-and-from letters of Pound and Wyndham Lewis. Organized into four parts, much of the interest of the volume is to be found in Mr. Materer's introductions, laying out the territory of each part. The most compelling and amusing letters are found in parts one and two (titled "Blasting" and "Bombardiering," respectively) in which the men's cooperative venture into periodical warfare (the two issues of *BLAST*) is yoked with World War I. Here is Lewis in the trenches, writing home to Uncle Ez the following vignette of his mates playing their

[2] Clarendon Press has recently published Volume One of Katherine Mansfield's *Collected Letters*, ed. by Vincent O'Sullivan and Margaret Scott. $27.50.

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phonograph: "They've just put on 'Sympathy'; may their next fart split up their backs, and asphyxiate them with the odour of their souls." Lewis had a right to be surly: "I have been on duty from 4.30 this morning till 8 this morning. We have been under shell fire all day—as all days, and all nights . . . Craters big enough to put a horse & cart in. It is a bad spot. There is no possibility of doing any work (writing) here." Pound replied sympathetically that he wished Lewis "would get a decent and convenient wound in some comparatively tactful part of your anatomy. Say the left buttock. But that makes lying in bed uncomfortable." Instead of getting wounded in the left buttock or elsewhere, Lewis caught trench fever, survived the battle of Passchendaele, and eventually was commissioned to do paintings of the warfare—such as a howitzer battery on Vimy Ridge, where Edward Thomas was killed.

After 1920, and as Pound's writing becomes progressively nuttier, harder to deciper and more boringly scatological ("Proust and Freud are unmitigated shit [he opines in 1940] they pass for intelligentzia because their shit is laid out in most elaborate arabesques") it is all harder going and mainly unprofitable. Still, Lewis never cut Pound off, and when after the Second World War Eliot sent along a friendly reference Pound had made to Lewis, the latter replied "I will of course write to him at once. I am not very good at deciphering his impulsive and temperamental script, but I believe I detected a note of humility in one place. A bad sign I am afraid: although otherwise he seems much as usual."[3]

D. H. Lawrence's letters march on, this volume the third one of seven and covering the crucial years 1916–21, "crucial" in that they decisively enact—with much repetitive insistence—the turn from visionary-"optimistic" Lawrence to a visionary-destructive-rejective one. Much of these nearly eight hundred pages are taken up with talk about *Women in Love*, the novel Lawrence finished in 1916 ("I have just finished a novel which everybody will hate *completely*") but which was not published till four years later, after the most unbelievably complicated of publishing exchanges, one that will prove wearying to any but the most devoted Lawrentian. Lawrence assumed that everybody would hate *Women in Love* "completely" because he was himself, in Yeats's phrase, choked with hate and used letters to stoke the flames, as in this 1916 one to Forster: "I am in a black fury with the world, as usual. One writes, one works, one gives one's hand to people. And the swine are rats, they bite one's hand. They are rats, sewer-rats, with all the foul courage of death and corruption, darkness and sewers." And on, and on. "I am glad

[3] Pound's "impulsive and temperamental script" may be further observed by those so inclined in his letters to John Theobald (*Ezra Pound/ Letters/ John Theobald*, ed. by Donald Pearce and Herbert Schneidau. Black Swan Books. $22.50). An earlier Pound may be glimpsed in *Ezra Pound and Dorothy Shakespeare: Their Letters* 1909–1914, ed. by Omar Pound and A. Walton Litz. New Directions. $37.50.

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you are beginning to reject people," he congratulates Catherine Carswell for doing: "They are separaters. They *are* a destructive force. They are like acid, which can only corrode and dissolve. One *must* shun them." Then follow familiar Lawrentian directives to cherish the "frail, precious buds of the unknown life in one's soul"—pretty stale stuff, really. "I always detested motorcars," he not at all helpfully informed Catherine Carswell, who had just had an auto accident. But it wasn't merely those detestable cars, it was the damned lambs who were getting into his garden in Cornwall: "I loathe lambs, those symbols of Christian meekness. They are the stupidest, most persistent, greediest little beasts in the whole animal kingdom. Really, I suspect Jesus of having had *very little* to do with sheep, that he would call himself The Lamb of God. I would truly rather be the little pig of God, the little pigs are infinitely gayer and more delicate in soul." One can have fun with this, especially with the notion of those infinitely gay pigs ("Little pig, who made thee? Dost thou know who made thee?") and with the angry DHL, building his fence in a vain effort to keep out "the filthy lambs [that] have eaten off my broad beans."

From the way he put it, in 1918, and if you don't read too closely, you might mistake him for a reasonable chap: "The only thing I don't seem to be able to stand is the presence of anyone else—barring Frieda, sometimes." A year later that "sometimes" evidently came less frequently: "I am not going to be left to Frieda's tender mercies until I am well again. She really is a devil . . . I have been bullied by her long enough." There is, to be sure, an occasional bit of cheerfulness, a good word tossed in one or two directions. But most of the life in these letters is in their violent negation: "Let's hope the insects will bite K to death," he writes S. S. Koteliansky, apropos Katherine Mansfield on the Italian Riviera. Or consider the following bit of Jew-baiting which sounds as if it might be Evelyn Waugh, intent on shocking softie liberals: "I hate Jews and I want to learn to be more *wary* of them all." Good luck with your anti-Semitism, seems the only response to such earnestly embarrassing stuff. As he said in a moment of self-knowledge: "But always remember I prefer my strife, infinitely, to other people's peace, havens, and heavens. God deliver me from the peace of this world." Surely his prayer was answered, and the final letter from this volume goes out with a bang as Evelyn Scott is advised to "Kick the posterior of creeping love, and laugh when it whimpers." Lawrence would have nine more years of attempting to follow his own advice. The idea of four further volumes of letters devoted to embodying it is, to say the least, daunting.

It is the repetitive bulk of Lawrence's letters that is daunting, not their intellectual or imaginative content, often commonplace enough. By contrast, Bernard Shaw's letters (1911–1925, the third of four projected volumes) are overwhelming in the way I should

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suppose great letters to be. For one thing, and it's a pretty ultimate thing, they make the ordinary reader like me feel slow-minded, lazy, ignorant about history, politics, society, and most everything else. If momentarily we're tempted to complain about the outrageousness of Shaw's egotism—"I am all right about Russian," begins a letter to H. G. Wells in December 1916, continuing "The longer I live the more I see that I am never wrong about anything, and that all the pains I have so humbly taken to verify my notions have only wasted my time"—a second thought convicts us of humorless literal-mindedness. For one thing, the recipient is that other man who is never wrong about anything, the second Mr. Know-It-All and quite accustomed to this sort of talk. For another, the sentence following consists of but two words—"Lemme explain"—after which Shaw launches into a long, marvelous explanation of why the Russians are, simply, "the most fascinating people in the world." Time and again his sentences perform what they promise, and by the time you finish the Russian letter you're ready to say, well, I see the sense in which the Russians are the most fascinating people in the world.

With Shaw the letter-writer, as to a lesser extent with Conrad, the fun is in tailoring the epistle to its recipient's character, so if writing to G. K. Chesterton, best to end with love to Mrs. Chesterton and their dog, then to add "To hell with the Pope!" Or to woo and bully Mrs. Patrick Campbell by confronting her with his early reviews of her which she is castigated for not appreciating properly:

> Are you not afraid of drawing down lightning on yourself? I! I who burnt up Shakespear so that his sparks might whirl about you in a halo of glory. Did I not come to you? Did I not march in your train with all my trumpets in D major and my trombones in D flat major? And you would not come to my squalid second floor in Fitzroy Square and give me the nail of your little toe to kiss! Even Duse threw me a haughty word; but you resented my inadequacy when I, the greatest critic in the world, had proclaimed you the most wonderful woman. . . . I challenge you passionately to produce one word that has ever been written of you by anybody that is more abandoned in its confession, that shouts more recklessly to all the world that the writer is your utter captive.

Five years later, her son having been killed by an enemy shell in France and she having sent to Shaw the consolatory letter written her by the company chaplain, Shaw, incensed and grieving for her, came back with "To hell with your chaplain and his tragic gentleness! [Mrs. Pat had used that phrase.] The next shell will perhaps blow *him* to bits; and some other chaplain will write such a nice letter to his mother. Such nice letters! Such nice little notices in pa-

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pers!" He ends the letter with a parade of "damn's" the last of which is writ large and black. Then comes this line: "And oh, dear, dear, dear, dear, dear, dearest!" It is strangely and strongly moving.

There are of course the expected and cherishable bits of Shaw being Shaw, for example his habits as a bather ("I do not take hot baths as part of my routine, because people who do so lose the tone of their skins and always look dirty")—and much *much* more. There are exhaustive instructions on how to rehearse plays; there is an evaluation of the effects of the Dempsey-Carpentier fight, the outcome of which he had predicted wrongly: "That fight has disgusted everybody with the ring." Most astonishingly, there is an account of the cremation of his mother at Golders Green, which experience left him exultant—"O grave, where is thy victory?"—and must have affected his motoring to Oxford afterwards: "The car was in a merry mood, and in Notting Hill Gate accomplished a most amazing skid, swivelling right round across the road one way and then back the other, but fortunately not hitting anything . . ." (How energizing this is by comparison with Lawrence's detestation of cars!) There is, finally, the best piece of literary criticism encountered in any of these letters, this one directed again at Mrs. Patrick Campbell:

> If you want to know the truth about Lady Macbeth's character, she hasn't one. There never was no such person. She says things that will set people's imaginations to work if she says them in the right way: that is all. *I* know: I do it myself.

Shaw's letters contain scores of things said in the right way and setting the imagination to work that is both hard and worth doing oneself as a reader. Like Falstaff he is the cause of wit that is in others.

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ROBERT McDOWELL

Poetry: Changes & Channels

RECENT POETRY MAINLY REFLECTS A CONTINUATION of patterns that became recognizable at the beginning of this decade. The will of the self-absorbed meditation weakens; narrative fascinates more and more; the lyric, in the right deft hands, holds its own. Frequently, these (by now) familiar patterns interlock in the efforts of a poet, creating a body of work that is rich in variety of method if in nothing else. For this article, I will discuss eleven books. Collectively, they showcase variety; individually, they illustrate strengths and weaknesses of the major patterns already mentioned. Three are retrospective collections, two suggest a comeback of wit and comedy among the young, two are chilling disappointments, three others are solid examples of poets in command of their material, and one, from Australia, is a great discovery.

Over the last twenty-five years, Wendell Berry[1] has developed a career that is a blueprint for anyone who would understand what it means to be a modern Man of Letters. Formerly a teacher, currently a farmer and occasional lecturer, he has written novels in the tradition of Sherwood Anderson, essays on language, land use, and conservation, and eight volumes of poetry. This beautiful book gathers together nearly two hundred poems and brings into focus the full weight and conviction of Berry's poetic achievement. His strength as a poet is elegy, and an elegiac tone is remarkably consistent throughout his career.

> All day our eyes could find no resting place.
> Over a flood of snow sight came back
> Empty to the mind.
>
> "Elegy"

The sight that returns "empty to the mind" has been directed beyond the farmhouse and cultivated fields, the land of peace, to a contemporary culture that has found no collective resting place. In the authoritative third person of "The Man Born to Farming," the poet clearly defines the gift that is the farmer's way of life: ". . . to him the soil is a divine drug. / He enters into death / yearly, and comes back rejoicing."

[1] COLLECTED POEMS 1957-1982, by *Wendell Berry*. North Point Press. $16.50.

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Ultimately, behind this solitary celebration lies loneliness, and this best defines Berry's sense of community. Neighbors, observed from an emotional distance, are admired for steady labor, for fitting into the natural cycle, which governs farming as it governs nothing else. In this world, community is that which drives one deeper into what one does every day. This is fundamentally different from the sense of community usually created in an urban setting. There the impulse is to blunt external forces and cultivate those relationships that divert attention from the daily grind.

But most of us live in cities. What, then, does this poet have to say *to us*? For one thing, he implicitly confronts our wish to be evasive. His poems make us examine anew the thousand poses we slip in and out of each day, dodging to remain untouched, unscathed. And if we are lucky, we feel self-conscious. Then we begin to explore the possibility of conduct based on those actions—working in harmony with the environment, loving without greed or malice, accepting what comes—that bring us together rather than keep us apart. For another, Berry reminds us that Community begins with the awareness that individuality is meaningful only when it fits harmoniously into the life-death cycle that is the rural *and* urban experience. The key to this knowledge is useful pursuit, labor done well that contributes to the lives of neighbors and gives back to the environment what it uses.

This philosophy is *not* new, it is as old as the oldest story. And it is just as timely—and necessary—as it was when first uttered around a fire.

Another retrospective collection, *The Salt Stone: Selected Poems*,[2] presents work from the first six volumes of poetry by John Woods. And with this substantial production before us, it should become clear to many what some of us have known all along: John Woods is one of those excellent poets who has never received the attention he deserves.

Like his immediate precursors, Theodore Roethke and Dylan Thomas, Woods has long been an adept maker of the lyrical epiphany. Like Wendell Berry, he is most at home in rural mid-America among stoic individuals. Some of the young wait silently for the day they may make their escape by joining the service or following the prospect of employment; others wait only to fill the vacated roles of their elders who adjust to harsh changes of physical and emotional weather, work hard, live and die. The poem "Bert in the Orchard" is a monologue spoken by a man remembering his first love fifty years past, a woman he saw making love to the preacher on the choir stage:

[2] THE SALT STONE: SELECTED POEMS, by *John Woods*. Dragon Gate Press. $8.00 p.

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She led me from the preacher's words, bending
his wooden voice over the swayed parish
like a windy oak, until chandeliers leaned
from the gale, and the church hove to
in the calm collection.

The lyric appeal of this and other poems results from the clear, free verse echo of distorted pentameter and shrewd couplings of adjectival constructions ("wooden voice/calm collection," "swayed parish/windy oak").

But the appeal of these poems is not merely mechanical. It has a lot to do with the author's point of view. "An unfrocked minister of change," his is the collective voice and memory of small towns all over America, small towns that are lost or losing, vanished or vanishing under parking lots and condominiums. He chronicles the daily lives of people struggling to hold on, and he does so without condescension or bitterness.

This honest compassion does not change when the poet's attention turns inward. While towns, times, and their cast of characters change, so does the individual witness. He ages, enters the military, endures three wars, and fears that his sons will fight in another. He loves, loses love, and loves again, accepting what comes his way and never expecting too much. His attitudes and perspective change gradually, so gradually that change seems consistent and right. There is little of the bandwagon here. In poem after poem Woods extols the virtues of love and prepares for the future by incessantly recovering the past. His sense of humor, integrity, and melodious speech give the work an undeniable authority.

Unlike the solid, steady progression of Wendell Berry and John Woods, Kenneth Koch's[3] career provides a roller–coaster read. Certainly one distinguishing feature is amazing energy. In their structures, these poems do not follow a dramatic curve; they vibrate at the edge of hysteria, pulsating like heavy metal rock'n'roll. It is not unusual to come out of them feeling as if you need to catch your breath and slow down your heartbeat. To follow this poet is to open yourself to the punishing ups and downs of a frenetic life. It is painful to observe the youthful exuberance of early volumes giving way to the elegiac tone of later books. Friends die or stop writing; lovers leave or die. These are major terrors awaiting us all, but perhaps they are even more terrifying to those who mythologize The Personal.

In the beginning, Koch assumed what might be likened to a Peck's Bad Boy persona, though he was more playful than malicious:

[3] SELECTED POEMS 1950-1982, by *Kenneth Koch*. Vintage Press. $9.95.

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> "Did you ever glance inside a bottle of sparkling pop,
> Or see a citizen split in two by the lightning? . . . "
> . . . .
> The black-haired man sits down, and the others shoot
> arrows at him.
>
> "Fresh Air"

This irreverence constrains an inclination toward satire, which is all to the good. Koch's talent, first and last, is in service to Eros. His long lines, except for occasional questions that usually indict, are generally declarative sentences. A sense of *place* is not really necessary, but a sense of the moodscape of the poet's mind is. There is little evidence of a formal sense of the line (when Koch tries, with blank verse, for example, the effect is wooden, as in "The Departure from Hydra"), but there is a heavy reliance on wit, the juxtaposition of one unexpected image with another. When he is *on*, as he frequently is, the overall result is entertaining and memorable. When he rambles, the method becomes tedious. This occurs more often in later work, as in the twenty-six page "Art of Love," in which Koch's pedantic impulse begins to assert itself with troublesome regularity. At such times I begin to feel as if I've been trapped by the impatient author of a "how to" book.

But these are simply two sides of an interesting poet. When Koch lampoons academia or stuffiness anywhere, or when he writes tenderly of a love affair, he is among the best we have.

After the retrospective volumes discussed above, it seems apt to turn to books by two poets who are working early in their careers. Joan Retallack and Gjertrud Schnackenberg are unique among younger writers in that they seem to be turning away from the brooding convention of desolation so popular among their peers.

In a recent essay on Language Poetry, "The Meta-Physick of Play" (*Parnassus*, Fall/Winter 1984), Joan Retallack provides a key to her own poems: "Play, from early childhood on, is a rigorous discipline requiring acute focus and concentration (not all children do it well) along with unfettered ingenuity. . . . As adults we need to concoct complicated justifications for play—themselves forms of play—because we don't entirely trust it as really worthwhile and serious, much less essential to our vitality." Turning to *Circumstantial Evidence*,[4] a note on the author informs us that she "grew up in Manhattan, the Bronx, and Charleston, South Carolina"—serially and simultaneously—and "has been interested in paradox and disjunction ever since." It shows, too; but she handles paradox and disjunction with more sophistication and dexterity than her distant cousins the Language Poets.

Retallack begins in a kind of poet's No Man's Land and wrestles

[4] CIRCUMSTANTIAL EVIDENCE, by *Joan Retallack*. Sultan of Swat Press. $6.00.

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with language—or *plays* with it, which is not to be confused with *toying* with it—in order to invent new ways it can signify a character, a character's story, a song or meditation, or the latest lyrical news. Her method is generally based on what I call Sequential Repetition. A simile, for example, is repeated but its meaning is subtly altered with each successive appearance:

> . . . of running through words
> like scales
> of the moon
> with its second hand light
> inviting scrutiny
> with its second hand light
> of the moon
> like scales
> of running through words . . .

The simile progresses from tangible flecks of moonskin, becoming an ephemeral musical progression when next it appears. Thus the introductory poem, "To Those Who Have Abandoned Words," develops by association of such unlikely images. If you would understand the method, it might be helpful to imagine someone climbing a staircase and seeing something different at each step. Then imagine that person's shadow descending a parallel shadow staircase, seeing the same things but seeing them with a difference. The poem ends where it begins, but the language has been made to do more than one would have thought possible. "I want that oceanic feeling—I am assembling a life." In doing so Retallack at her best creates the timely surprise. A random list of her titles suggests her good humor and versatile preoccupations: "Exercises in Perspective," "The Adventure of Dialectic, II," "Zoösemiotics," "The New Realism," "Woman Dragged By Welsh Corgis," and "Mars Bars." And, of course, the title poem speaks to this volume's overall concerns. Utilizing no punctuation and few capitals, basing everything on speed and playful inundation, Retallack reads a little like Gertrude Stein with a lot less time.

The fourteen poems in Gjertrud Schnackenberg's second collection[5] convince me that she is capable of successfully making any type of poem she sets her mind to. Her precursors appear to be the Byron of "Don Juan," Lewis Carroll, Andrew Marvell, and Robert Herrick:

> I don't love you because you're good at rhymes,
> And not because I think you're not-so-dumb,
> I don't love you because you make me come

[5] THE LAMPLIT ANSWER, by *Gjertrud Schnackenberg*. Farrar, Straus and Giroux. $12.95.

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> And come and come innumerable times, . . .
> "Love Letter"

The exercise of rhyme and meter here is superb, but this has been mentioned by others before me. I am most captivated by her point of view, her humorous, healthy, and inspiring humanity. In addition, I am drawn to the highly dramatic content of her work. In the use of historical figures this poet does not relegate them to minor roles, as so many of her contemporaries would. Rather, she departs from mainstream strategy by suggesting that a character-in-time is less important than the truths—major and minor—that character represents when successfully stepping out of time. The result is a first-rate development of non-linear narrative. For example, in "The Heavenly Feast," Simone Weil chooses to starve, sending her meager rations to the less-fortunate of France. The description of her choice and death is haunting and lovely, but rather than conclude there the poet negotiates a transition to the powerful scene of Weil in heaven, refusing to eat at God's table until all of the people on earth are fed. Any poet who can write "The Heavenly Feast" as well as the hilarious light verse fairy tale, "Two Tales of Clumsy," obviously has great range, range we do not find in most contemporary volumes. Whether Schnackenberg narrates the development of Chopin in the free verse sequence "Kremlin of Smoke" or imagines an address by the Yugoslav painter, Ivan Generalic, to his wife, whether she retells family history or irreverently chronicles the trials of romance in poems that remind me of the best of Hollywood's screwball comedies of the thirties, the manipulation of form and subject is *always* astonishingly flawless.

Finally, it is delightful to be reminded of the assertion put forth by T. S. Eliot and Philip Larkin, among others, that form is the yardstick by which we measure a poet's individuality. As in the case of Joan Retallack, Gjertrud Schnackenberg's form admits humor and self-effacement, a sense that all about us is not dire, and this revived spirit of play is refreshing. Both of these poets, quick-witted archivists, are restoring lost possibilities to poetry while approaching the verge of breaking new ground.

Unfortunately, I cannot sound so positive when discussing the next two volumes.

James Merrill's[6] latest book is a bore. In meditative, occasional poems, the narrator flits from externality to externality, promising far more in beginnings than he is able, or willing, to deliver. This is a book about the passage of time. Mostly, it is a lamenting commemorative spawned by an ineffectual, late-Romantic sensibility. Like so many weary contemporary poems, these are made in their creator's image, little flawed vessels of self-worship. Here the poet-hero is

[6] LATE SETTINGS, by *James Merrill.* Atheneum. $12.95; $6.95.

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getting old and the world, poor grotesque, ages too. The atmosphere is stuffy, the tone disdainful, the style gimmicky and dull.

> The billionth-or-so dawn,
> And yet how primitive
> The little factory looks, upstream,
> Its brickwork that of "early man"
>
> Launched and paddling through creation's
> At-a-stroke venerable inventory
> Baked into clay banks, bedded onto stone,
> The day meanwhile our own.
> "A Day On the Connecticut River"

Yes, the world ages, and how pathetic Man is (his *primitive*, *little* factory). Note the fussiness of *early man* in quotes. If irony is intended it fails. The reader must endure nine routine quatrains of predictable descriptions before striking the lament at the heart of this poem and book:

> Ah but, our zenith passed, my friend,
> Two galley slaves, retracing a dead end
> Of scum-glaze, lilypad, Atari dragonfly,
> We're cuffed alert by headwind—empty sky . . .

The speaker sees himself and his companion as slaves trapped in life, an inaccurate description which includes conventional river imagery and computer graphics. Who can buy this? Can galley slaves *retrace* anything? Are they rowing or drawing lines? Can *scum-glaze* or a *lilypad* be a *dead end*? For that matter, can a computer graphic? And if you were startled by a strong head wind, would the sky be empty? It is difficult to feel sympathy for a speaker who sneers at the world while choking up as he speaks of himself. Another poem, "Domino," begins "Delicious, white, refined / Is all that I was raised to be, . . .," and you get the feeling that this poet believes it, even thinks it is ok.

James Merrill's indiscriminate, windy style also allows him to toss together long poems like an eccentric's salad. Until recently (as long as sheer length was assumed to imply narrative) he was considered one of our finest narrative poets; perhaps he still is, by those who know nothing about narrative. In this volume, the best example is "Santorini: Stopping the Leak." The speaker of this 240-line poem comes "by baby jet to Santorin" to dine with a friend and her "three old maiden sisters." This is revealed in the first three octaves. And what *happens* in the poem? Nothing. Nothing but the recurrence of a troublesome wart and the cancellation of dinner. We must get to the twenty-fifth octave to discover this last detail. This *is* remark-

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able. I can think of few contemporary poets who could get away with 240 lines of wooden, rhymed pentameter that say nothing at all.

> A cinéma-mensonge. Long, flowing fits
> Of seeing—whose? Utterly not my own:
> Bayonet fixed, one olive-skinned Iraqi
> Guarding the stairwell of a wartime Ritz;
> The look outflashing from his brass and khaki, . . .

If you take poetry, even comic poetry, seriously, you may find this sort of self-indulgent writing obscenely trivial (Iraqi—khaki?).

Amy Clampitt's new book[7] follows by two years her celebrated debut in *The Kingfisher*. Unfortunately, the strident, accompanying hype makes it difficult to enjoy this book for what it is: a collection of good occasional poems. The hype has everything to do with the wishful thinking of promoters and nothing to do with Clampitt's poetry. It is a disservice to Clampitt to compare her work, as one jacket note does, to the achievements of Hopkins, Keats, Yeats, and Stevens. All of them wrote occasional poems, but we do not hold them in high esteem because of it. All of them had powerful philosophical world views, which they expressed in original living speech. Clampitt does not. In "Urn-Burial and the Butterfly Migration" she declares "Oh, / we know nothing / of the universe we move through!" This sounds like posturing, especially at a time when we know an immense amount—and maybe more than we want to—about the universe. And later in the same poem we meet the following:

> . . . But then the rigor
> of becoming throttled our pure
> ignorance to mere haste
> toward something else.

What *is* "pure ignorance" but inaccurate, sentimental speech? There is always betrayal, stealth, loss, denial, or poor judgement creating ignorance. There is always a precedent, which this poet denies or chooses to ignore. And what are we to make of "mere haste"? Is it necessary—and accurate—to qualify the abstract noun with the trivializing adjective? Is *becoming*, no matter how it turns out, ever trivial? I make much of this because, in poetry, accuracy of sentiment is everything.

But we live at a moment in which accuracy of sentiment is not especially prized. At times, it appears that we do not expect much of poetry beyond occasionally diverting us from the real concerns

[7] WHAT THE LIGHT WAS LIKE, by *Amy Clampitt*. Knopf. $14.95; $8.95.

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of our lives. At times, we appear to read poetry in order to experience the same small joy we feel upon completing a crossword puzzle. The revelation, if any, is easily sloughed off.

What the Light Was Like is like that. The poet constructs an occasion by observing a fixed (plant, television) or frozen (animal, emotion) thing. Subjects do not convey any sense of movement. Clampitt's is a still world, bearing little resemblance to the one we live in. The relative unimportance of figures *as characters* is clearly illustrated in the title poem. In it a man in a boat dies. We wait for the boat to be discovered. Clampitt takes seventeen lines to get from the spotting of the boat to the focus in on the character "slumped against the kegs." Then the narrator departs for speculation's sake. The character's death is ignored. What matters is the way the light must have looked as he died. And not how it looked to him, or to anyone. Just how it looked.

Though Clampitt is forever pursuing such abstract moments, one wonders just what they are moments of. Origin? Innocence? A world-weary yearning for complication's demise? As we make our way through this poet's curiously unnatural natural world we begin to hunger for the accurate, resonant descriptions of Theodore Roethke, John Clare, or an acute contemporary observer of nature, Dennis Sampson.

Finally, *What the Light Was Like* thoroughly embraces the all-too-familiar conceits and forms of the Romantic tradition. This is its limitation and its chief value. It is not original living speech, but at its best it works hard to render faithfully the occasions that inspire it.

The next three volumes illustrate the on-going development of three accomplished poets.

The Mural of Wakeful Sleep[8] is Laurence Lieberman's fifth collection and third of this decade. In its first four sections an unobtrusive narrator travels through Jamaica and the Dominican Republic, Barbados and St. Lucia, and ends with the long title poem (section five) in which he discovers the perfect metaphor for himself: the church mural painter. Along the way, Lieberman's familiar visual prosody organizes abundant detail and paces the reader, who might otherwise struggle from time to time trying to keep up.

Among the few genuinely narrative American poets writing today, Lieberman is never likely to intrude on subject matter. His responsibility is to depiction, his inclination to describe. Thus he dares to employ more adjectives than most poets as he links detail to detail to detail until—until we feel as if we see every strand of a complex world. The point of view is unique. This narrator gives the impression that he must assimilate everything and speak of it with the celebratory zeal of Walt Whitman. He also has the capacity to question, to witness while participating:

[8] THE MURAL OF WAKEFUL SLEEP, by *Laurence Lieberman.* Macmillan. $8.95.

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> . . . Three larger hunks, spaced in a row
> near the road edge,
> rise at once—they levitate,
> a foot or more. Suspended by invisible cables from above?
> "Jamaica Flambeaux"

A question that follows upon The Unexplained occurs periodically in this book, and the device enables the poet to *include* the reader, to make him feel as if he and the narrator are standing side by side at the scene, witnessing. Many poems begin with the narrator (and reader) being physically conveyed (by plane, car, etc.) to a setting, and once the setting is established, character becomes the focal point. Whether Lieberman tells the story of the Banana Dwarf or the terrifying dungeon tour guide at Fort Charlotte, his historical awareness enables him to integrate past and present, constructing an all-inclusive narrative without gaps.

The point here is honest observation and deft expression. The title poem, in which the narrator meets his spiritual double, is a marvelous example. The mural painter of Roseau Church throws "open each set / of barred shutters in succession . . . Great columns / of daylight come hurtling into the hall with the force / of physical bodies— / hurled masses of light, fierce locomotives of fire—." This is not unlike the poet who gathers and catalogues detail as if all history depended on it. As the painter's task becomes more complex (he is painting the history of his village, Christianity, his life), the painter himself becomes completely absorbed in it, refusing food and visits from his family. "The trick is, we can outwit death with colors!" The narrator believes that the same is true of words.

I cannot leave this volume without commenting on another of its distinguishing features. In addition to an historical eye and assembler's ear, Lieberman possesses a fine sense of humor. Excellent illustrations occur in "The Queen of Billiards" and "Sunday: My Throat Afire." In the former, a pool shark is surpassed by a woman; in the latter the narrator, seeking relief from a sore throat, has amusing trouble escaping from a zealous island Shaman.

The Mural of Wakeful Sleep is a substantial book. I believe that it is Laurence Lieberman's best so far.

T. R. Hummer's new book[9] is dominated by poems that continue and refine one category of the narrative renaissance in current American poetry. The category I have in mind consists of poems in which a qualified narrative line has been imposed on meditations about love and family relationships. The line is qualified in that the author insists on the right to interrupt it with meditative gambits that disrupt succession, forcing the reader to shift focus from the story to the storyteller and back again. This strategy, becoming in-

[9] THE PASSION OF THE RIGHT-ANGLED MAN, by *T. R. Hummer*. University of Illinois. $8.95.

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creasingly popular over the last five years, can be memorable in the best work of Larry Levis, Dave Smith, Sydney Lea, David Wojahn, and Hummer himself.

Thematically, this is a volume of muted elegies. The poet witnesses (rather than celebrates or pays homage to) events—and their attendant state of consciousness—which lead to love and love's loss. Hummer seizes a number of occasions to dream himself back to the boy and adolescent he once was, suffering the frenzied anticipation of love: "The woman I will lie down with . . . The woman I will know." At other times, he poignantly examines adult passion and the pain of losing it. In addition, he possesses an excellent *feel* for rural living, depicting its violence, which is not gratuitous but one of many facts. These are lives in which love is essential but always tenuous.

In this book's outstanding poem, "Traps," Hummer's first-person narrator awakens from a drunken sleep. The poem's second section flashes back to the morning the narrator was startled from sleep by the blast of a shotgun "not thirty yards from the window." Blasted from "dreaming a woman's hand," he discovers that his neighbor has just killed a dog, which he tosses into a nearby field. The surreal, nightmare images of the third section chronicle the narrator's appearance at a party where a "witch sneaked up behind me / Where I leaned on a doorframe watching / A monkey fondle the tits / Of a jolly transvestite." Leaving the party in section four, we accompany the narrator as he drives "Over every drought-burnt field / In Oklahoma" looking for "one respectable tree." Out of the car, feeling foolish, he embraces the tree and grieves for a lost love. He drives home, late, to find his neighbor boiling traps, getting the dead smell off. Section five finds the narrator awakened again, this time by a raccoon beside the garbage cans, its paw caught in a trap. He curses his neighbor, wonders what to do ("Kill it? Let it go?"), then breathes "a long breath, grateful / For what has been taken from me" as the creature, panicking at the sight of him, vanishes. Returning to bed, the narrator is surprised to find a woman there, "Too young, passed out, mouth open / In dead sleep, in a soundless / Snore." She is the "witch" from the party. Feeling the "wrong cut through" him, he runs outside to

> Find it there, crushed, chewed, torn off,
> Left behind in the jaws, a small
> Hand put out in the dark
> Face of salvation: gone.

"Traps" magnificently veers from conventional succession and employs meditation only when it develops naturally within the context of the story. This poem, and others here, suggest that T. R. Hummer has the ability to exceed the current success of the confessional

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meditative narration and pilot this resurgent form in directions it has not yet fully explored.

In the prelude to her seventh collection, Patricia Goedicke[10] writes, "Whose world do we think this is? / O my friends take it." The rest of the book explores this surrender, struggles to turn it back on itself, and breaks through to moments of repose in which "the ordinary takes off its mask."

The first section (of three) is by far the most disturbing. In her characteristic long lines of packed and extended metaphor, Goedicke seems like one heroically condemned to identify "each sad sign of change." The moving van, contemporary symbol of our displacement, is "ominous, offstage, with the powerful motor running"; families "split up into scissors"; a husband and wife are trapped by the life they've built: "The two pianos of their past are ravens." Even history provides no consolation, no proof that we have learned from our past. In "The Reading Club" the poet attends a performance where she gains the insight that every community has its equivalent of legendary women, "its tart, its magical false Helen . . . / in all the makeup she can muster." Slavishly clinging to surfaces, afraid of the hard news that may lie beneath them, we cheat our capacity to live, become "mere gristle in the teeth of fate." This revelation may be more terrifying to the person who suffers it than the cramped half-lives of those who never do. "In the Aquarium" is an excellent example. A group at a party surrounds a blind friend. They are conscious of that person's vulnerability. Then, "like a fish looming against glass," the narrator detects "the sinister bulk shape of someone watching us." The blind friend's vulnerability extends to envelop them all.

The book's middle section begins with "Hands That Have Waved Farewell," a poem whose tone is less despairing, more accepting:

> Cities I had thought lost forever
> That have returned to me, . . .

This spirit of resolution continues in the four-part "The Structures We Love," a grand summary of the themes of the preceding section. Also included here is a cycle of love poems, which only occasionally mixes a metaphor or succumbs to sentimentality. Overall, the poems of this section come as a relief after the harrowing poems preceding them.

Finally, Goedicke's closing section recapitulates the concerns of the book, building to a crescendo in the long poem "The Tongues We Speak." Here, especially, it is clear that she is not content with her efforts to create the clear language of survival. She exhorts us

[10] THE WIND OF OUR GOING, by *Patricia Goedicke*. Copper Canyon Press. $8.00.

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to listen to each other, to try harder, and to survive those moments when we "feel like wood/Waiting for someone to peel" us. And how do we survive? Goedicke goes far toward convincing herself—and us—that our best defense against Fate may be thoroughly living every good moment that comes our way.

I had not encountered John Millett's[11] work until I received his sixth book of poetry for review here. It has been a delightful discovery. Briefly, the facts of this fascinating poet's life are these: Since 1952 he has practiced law in Australia, he served as a R.R.A.F. Air Gunner during World War II, and he raises and races champion sprinters at his Talkara Park Stud Farm. A few years ago, he drew on his war experiences to write *Tail Arse Charlie*, a volume of poetry that was later adapted into a radio play.

In a jacket note on the current volume, Millett describes Cunderang Country as a "microcosm where English and Irish were woven together like the rough gray and blue garments worn on old Aran." The landscape is horsey, haunting—I imagine coastal California in the 1850s—and rich in place names (Creek of the Dun Cow, Stony Batter, Bull Ant Spur, Terrible Vale, Nuggety Gully). It is here that the poet sets his stories of six generations of the Callaghan family. It is a country that inspires lyric narration, and Millett's handling of this difficult strategy is as richly diversified as his own real-life experience. Interweaving poetry and prose fragments that resemble journal entries through four sections and 116 pages, Millett succeeds in reclaiming 150 years of dramatic history. It is a story of unforgettable characters and episodes: young Shamus who races his horse "into the earth itself / without leavin so much as a hole"; Martha, "the big apple—18 stone dressed or undressed—an orchard of serum and spice"; Patrick, a champion hurler who after an injury takes up the flute and fiddle and later becomes King of the pipers; Tom Trapp, "red-ragger / born loser of a hundred fights"; old Paddy Callaghan, breeder of thoroughbreds who "gripped life hard."

In addition to the stories of these and other characters, the witnessing of children is all-important here. Eventually, we understand the young immigrant's slow coming to terms with simultaneous loyalty—the Family's traditional ties to the Old Country and its present pragmatic reality in The New. Episodes concerning the elders periodically give way to episodes of youthful rites of passage. There are vivid recollections of hunting, skinning, and cooking rabbits ("Praise the Rabbit Plague"), of "the day Robert Callaghan said / to his son and me 'You two can butcher / that ol porry in the woodshed / paddock—here's the gun.'", of school vacations when boys hunted The Black Brush and camped in a Bullocky's hut, of killing snakes and listening, rapt, to the tall tales of Uncle Danny:

[11] COME DOWN CUNDERANG, by *John Millett*. Poetry Australia, South Head Press. $7.50.

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Yes—worked on a death ray too
and could flick a snake's head off
like you crack a stock whip
"The Liars of Cunderang"

Finally, The Horse, literally and figuratively, races through all of these interlocking segments like the physical representation of poetry itself. The emotional peak of *Come Down Cunderang* is "The Golden Mile," a thrilling account of a legendary race. It is the best six pages of writing on the subject that I have ever encountered. Afterwards, I felt as mystified and elated as I did following Secretariat's victory by nearly thirty lengths in the Belmont years ago.

Many Americans, especially urban Americans, might find it difficult to enter imaginatively a sprawling narrative in which people, animals, and the land itself are so intricately and essentially bound together. The condition is not far back in our past, but for most of us it *is* in the past. And gone for good. The best we can do is keep it alive in memory. Accomplishing this, John Millett has created a dramatic world I did not know before I read his book. What more should a book of poetry do?

NOTES ON CONTRIBUTORS (*continued from page 622*)

ALFRED DORN* is a full professor at Queensborough Community College (CUNY). He has won fifty poetry prizes, including First Prize in the Poetry Society of America's National Awards (1979).

CHARLES MARTIN spent August at the Djerassi Foundation in Woodside, California, working on a book about Catullus.

PETER MAKUCK is the author of *Breaking and Entering* (University of Illinois Press), a collection of short stories, and *Where We Live* (BOA Editions), a volume of poetry. He edits *Tar River Poetry*.

Since 1970, JAMES F. MAYBURY* has been professor of English at Franklin Pierce College. In the academic year 1982-83 he was a visiting professor at Heilongjiang University in the People's Republic of China, and last fall he returned to China as a visiting professor at Shanghai Teachers University.

EVAN ZIMROTH* is the author of *Giselle Considers Her Future*. She teaches at Queens College.

HENRI COLE* is a native of Virginia presently living in New York City. His first collection of poetry, *The Marble Queen*, will be published by Atheneum this spring.

HAROLD WITT is the author of *The Light at Newport* (Black Willow) and *The Snow Prince* (Blue Unicorn).

MICHAEL GORRA is an assistant professor in the English Department at Smith College.

ROBERT McDOWELL lives in Santa Cruz, California. With Mark Jarman, he edits and publishes *The Reaper* and the new Story Line Press Poetry Series.

LIAM RECTOR's* first book of poems, *The Sorrow of Architecture*, was published by Dragon Gate in 1984. He and his family have recently returned to Baltimore, Maryland.

**Asterisk indicates a new contributor.*

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LIAM RECTOR

The Creatures in Their Places

SHORTLY AFTER RILKE MET RODIN, the sculptor sent the poet to the Paris zoo to learn how to stare and comprehend as an artist, how to *see*. Rilke visited the zoo daily for many days, describing the panther he gazed upon and the cage framing the panther, the world within and beyond the panther and the cage. It was only after weeks of observation (and extended *describing*, which is the hex upon much poetry of late) that Rilke, through an act of sympathetic imagination, began to embody the panther and speak of and for the panther, as it were, from the inside out. Galway Kinnell, in this same lineage, did the same for bear.

A teacher once put a dead fish before a class of drawing students and told them to draw the fish. The next day the students came back and the same fish was put before them and the instructor said, "Draw it." And the same for weeks until they had in effect drawn what they could see of the demise of the fish. The point of all this is to enter the life (or the undoing) of one's subject, catching the *motion* of the life, what is behavioral and observable about it, and what is invisible and can only be entered through a rapport of consciousness, a sympathy of motive. Do not think, counselled Rimbaud; *be thought*. And in poetry, added Eliot, have no ideas, but rather the consequence of living with ideas . . .

Dennis Sampson, in his first book of poems *The Double Genesis*,[1] practices this *seeing* that was so hard won by Rilke, and adds to that embodiment the consequence, on his own terms, of living amidst creatures and that odd, almost ahuman creature, the creature of thought. Sampson's world in *The Double Genesis* is one wherein the poet, the mediating "I," exists as a part of the mosaic of forces contingent upon the presence (or the absence, as is most often the case here) of a god that might give design to an otherwise inchoate prowl, a spectacle of seeing and being seen.

When Sampson is embodying that mosaic and allowing forces, presences to speak for themselves, we exist directly in a world of relationships which have designs upon us, even if we can't decipher the designer, as in the poem "Bite Down on the Azalea," where the lunacy of personification is redeemed by the plausibility of beings existing alongside each other.

Mere description, unless occasioned by a sensibility and technique

[1] THE DOUBLE GENESIS, by *Dennis Sampson*. Story Line Press. $14.00; $6.95.

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comparable to that of a Francis Ponge, say, is always too much of nothing. Unless the reader can hear, through tone or through the means of production embedded within a poem (style, structure) the *motive* for description, then all meaning, all sense of context is lost. One then inhabits the D Ward of the imagination wherein creatures are forever babbling, describing . . . forever young, and all in the lacking sense.

Sampson occasionally lapses into such description, as in the poems "The Turtle" and "Cellars," and there he gets outside his subject. Poems like these remind me of a deluge of student still lifes, exercises in words, words, words . . . failing both to inhabit and catch the motion of world(s) in action.

And yet despite these unembodied observations, Sampson's poems most often oscillate within a terrain where what's human keeps appropriately to itself, comes almost religiously to itself without attempting to 'humanize' or overdescribe, overdetermine the world. Poems such as "Morning Ceremony," "The Tulip in the Glass," "The Message," "Mornings My Father Couldn't Work, He Would"—all these act to fulfill Sampson's significant talents for orchestrating the many lives and forms that hover amidst his own living and observing in these poems.

For some ungodly reason many of our younger poets have been writing brilliantly about heaven—*Raw Heaven, No Heaven*—and there is one poem in *The Double Genesis* where Sampson drops the *n* in heaven and, excerpted here, makes his contribution:

> I like the word, yet am terrified
> By its violence. Heave, as when the mother screams
> And yields to the fetus in her belly,
> Heave of the wind, the martyr heaved into the flames
> After an hour in the sun
> With others, who, sick at the thought,
> Retched black gruel upon the ground. Heaven
>
> Is hardly imaginable. But heave,
> Unholy as the stone held and heaved
> At the heretic, heave is the product of the body's
> Difficult knowledge, Adam heaved from paradise
> And Christ, familiar with heaven, heaving the cross
> Up the hill, jeered at, then himself nailed
> To the cross and the cross heaved into position.
>
> With his body on it, Lucifer heaved
> From heaven, who now delights in the heave
> Of souls into hell, created when our earth
> Heaved to make way for him,
> Repulsed. But it so happens heave
> Is equally beautiful as heaven, two words
> Unlike in meaning, yet separated by a letter. For isn't

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The meteor heaved through the night sky
Memorable to the lovers, the water heaved
From the precipice the point in putting
Hands above our eyes to watch
Beside the waterfall? The man on his deathbed
Heaves forward, to face his family,
Before he suddenly knows the secret heaven

Keeps from us; the egret crouches and heaves
From the cypress, flying low over the lake,
Then heaves himself beneath the rippled surface
And is gone from the eye, heaving himself then
Up with tremendous power. Heave.
It does not redeem like its lovely counterpart.
But it is vivid. It is always with us. Not heaven, heave.

Here Sampson presses repetition and wordplay into the service of a movement that is almost ballad-like, yet far from the linguistic vagaries of filling-out-the-form.

The title poem of *The Double Genesis* is notable for its long, ambitious creation myth, told from within the context of a family. Its prosody is fascinating, akin to what Frank Bidart has called "fastening the voice to the page." If Sampson's reach exceeds his grasp here, that's no great matter. *The Double Genesis* is much more than another hurried-to-publication first book. It bears a signature and a palpable intelligence; it gives birth to and exhausts a wide range of concerns.

Vern Rutsala's *Backtracking*[2] is a book of *place*, poised against the hysterical mobility (and its attendant, relative freedoms) of our national life. Given the confines of any place, and we are talking suburban/provincial/The Town limb of The City here, Rutsala finds what mobility there is in memory and memory's ability to backtrack, summon up, and transform, through an act of imaginative comparison, what we find missing in the present, unlikely in the future. Rutsala's nostalgia, his rueful escape, is not based on any longing for the 'organic society' of an agrarian past, nor upon any innocence contained in the pre-reality principle of childhood or youth.

The past in *Backtracking* starts in the past of the Depression, where children watched the towering grownups whittled away at by jobs and money, brought to a flinty resolution over what it meant to be *tough*, to see the time and the circumstance through as an aggressive witness and a reluctant participant.

But toughness
was honored, some irreducible
the Depression couldn't steal.
You gave up a tooth here,

[2] BACKTRACKING, by *Vern Rutsala*. Story Line Press. $14.00; $6.95.

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a black eye there but never
gave up the final thing . . .

These same Depression children, at least united in the circumstance which sought to divide them, later found themselves isolated in a kind of suburb of the soul, left to walk down sidewalks under crime lights where "the only way out is against the law, / something you always knew," and the word "neighbor" is never used without a sense of scathing irony.

The term "place" is incessantly used in trying to get to the heart of American poetry, and given the size and history of America how could it be otherwise? Place, and the assemblage of people, weather, landscape, economy, temperaments and other creatures that figure into a place, are Rutsala's dramatic residence in these poems. As in Philip Levine's Detroit, people come from one place to another, conscious or unconscious of the drifts of history through which they travel, for which they are the gas pedal and the brake (with the politicians pushing in the clutch?), and these persons are then transformed by the collisions of their dreams, needs, displacement, luck and labor. In the accounting of the American poet, this transformation is seldom a happy one. What accompanies it is most often a violent nostalgia and a nervous sense of reinventing the present and one's place in it.

As with the local and particular gone general and historical in the work of Levine, James Wright, Donald Hall, Richard Hugo, and others, Rutsala stakes out his claim with W.C. Williams' Paterson, Charles Olson's Gloucester, and perhaps even James Joyce's Dublin nipping at his heels. The *confines* of place press everywhere in Rutsala's geography, yet the breadth of this world is hauntingly general, akin to Beth Joselow's remarkable harbor city in *The April Wars*.

The locale that Rutsala inhabits throughout most of the book goes by way of memory until it engages that Romantic turn wherein memory collides with imagination and is melted down, fired up into the work of art. Hence the book continually returns to poem as refuge, words as redeemer:

With the only tools
at hand
words
Tracking down the page . . .

. . . Dreaming a city
into being

And what are these people from the Depression, men particularly, now doing? For Rutsala, in "My Buddies," they are all down at the Lotus Hotel:

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Men over the hill
and out of gas
Pitchers who lost it
All the tragic flaws
Doctor Strangelove
The strike-out king
oh yes especially
The strike-out king
This is the losers' caucus
"But come on down" they yell
"We ain't particular
There's plenty of room for you"

And in "The Dwelling of the Past," Rutsala later goes on record with what his response to this would be:

Which is why I travel my
private beefsteak mine, my
shadow home of memory. I have
the shares, I own fifty-one percent.

This is a fine and troubling book. "The poem of travel without arrival / Arrives / And some day when it's too late / To be too late / We'll found a town / And call it Smithereens." I greet *Backtracking* with the same enthusiasm I felt for Hugo's *The Lady in Kicking Horse Reservoir* and *What Thou Lovest Well Remains American*, though there's a vast difference in the sympathy with which Hugo wrote of those he considered to be losers. In Hugo's work the protagonist is less proud and apart, though the same beleaguered tone dogs each writer. Whatever the case (and writers are responsible solely to this), Rutsala has stared deeply and has named and brought back what he saw.

This is the maiden voyage for Story Line Press (launched just after the *Titanic* was found and photographed) and it's an admirable beginning: a bravura debut by a startling newcomer and a violent maturing by a poet who has published five previous volumes. As much as a separate poem, a book has its own kind of story. These two books willingly subject themselves to the lie detector wherein our actual public language, what's common between us, is increasingly debased; and they never plead the Fifth.

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IN THIS ISSUE:

The Goebbels office, hyperactive even with the Reich collapsing all around it, made use of Dresden in broadcasts and leaflets. Estimates of the dead making the rounds in Berlin, at first between 180,000 and 220,000, were soon revised downward to 120,000—150,000. The Soviets obliquely used the matter in a different way. Dresden was occupied by the Red Army on May 8, 1945, the day of the German surrender. Hanns Voigt, the director of the Missing Persons Bureau's Division of the Deceased, reported in writing to the Soviet commanders his own conservative estimate that the raids had killed 135,000. The Russians, apparently informed that belittling the Allies' might was the order of the day, "calmly struck off the first digit," in Voigt's words.

—Robert S. Clark, "Letter from Dresden," pp. 536-537.

Why did Leonard Woolf choose to portray Harry as aggressively Jewish when he was not that way himself? Why did he not permit Harry to marry Camilla when he himself had married Virginia? Who are the wise virgins? And what do they know?

—Harold Fromm, "Leonard Woolf and His Virgins," p. 566.

Early one rainy morning just about a week ago, Jack and me were sitting in a laudromat in this little town where we'd spent the night in an unlocked car. We sleep in cars a lot of times, it's not as bad as you might think. A little cramped maybe, but if there's a radio and a key to make it work, we don't mind too much. Like that night we were in a big new-smelling Cadillac in a used car lot. Jack said they could make it smell that way with an aerosol can.

—Kermit Moyer, "Tumbling," p. 579.

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